# IN DEFENCE OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER

E. J. BICKNELL

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# IN DEFENCE OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER

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# In Defence of Christian Prayer

A CONSIDERATION OF SOME OF THE INTELLECTUAL DIFFICULTIES THAT SURROUND PETITION

BY

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# INTRODUCTION

THE object of this book is not directly devotional. It does not aim at instruction in the art of prayer. Its aim is humbler, to examine and meet various objections brought against the practice of prayer from the side of science, psychology and philosophy, which, if admitted, would render prayer intellectually impossible or at the least seriously limit its scope. Many are seriously hindered and weakened in their prayers by intellectual difficulties, often but not always of a vague kind. The only remedy is to drag them out into the open and examine them by the light of reason. Such a process, however, even if successful, cannot by itself prove the value of prayer. The value of prayer can only be proved by praying. But it can at least make it possible for a man to give himself to prayer with his whole mind. In short this book does not attempt, as it were, to lead its readers into the sanctuary, but only to show them that the door is still open and to dust the hassocks on which they can kneel. It lies with them to enter or not to enter. Only by venturing within can they prove for themselves what the sanctuary really contains and whether the venture is worth while.

If little is said about adoration or thanksgiving as elements in worship, that is not because they are considered as of secondary importance, but because the most serious intellectual difficulties centre round petition. If the reality and value of petition is once granted, little difficulty will be found, on the intellectual side, about the rest of Christian worship.

It may be added that this book is not written primarily for the expert psychologist or philosopher but for the ordinary educated man or woman. While the author believes all the arguments in it to be true, they would have been expressed somewhat differently if addressed to a professional audience. The dogmatic tone of certain passages demands some apology. It is due to limitations of space, not to blindness to the enormous complexity of the problems discussed.

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# CHAPTER I

## THE EVOLUTION OF PRAYER

ALL life is in some sense petitionary. It makes unceasing demands on its environment. The stimulus to every department of human activity is unsatisfied desire. Even art is a quest. It is against this background of striving and desire that we must set any study of prayer. For prayer in the broadest meaning of the word represents religion in its aspect of desire. Its origin is bound up with the origin of religion. Its development has a history in time. We must begin therefore by sketching very summarily and in outline some of the most important facts connected with the development of prayer considered merely as a characteristic human activity.

Religion may perhaps best be defined, so far as it is possible to define it at all, as man's attitude to certain powers conceived of as able to help him to realize his interests. The origin of religion is to be found in "feeling in the presence of an object." Its beginnings are to be sought in a level of experience which is prerational. Man became aware however dimly of a presence in contact with which he experienced certain emotions. The exact nature of these we will not now attempt to discuss. It is enough to state that they included on the one hand feelings of awe and dread and on the other hand a sense of attraction. In time man attempted to interpret to himself this vague sense

of a mysterious power and to construct a rudimentary theology. For our present purpose it is important to note that religion is older than theology. Man did not come to a belief in some god or gods and then decide that it would be advantageous to pray to them. Nor did belief in the supernatural arise as a philosophical hypothesis to account for what was abnormal. That would be to assign to primitive man far too great an intellectual development. His conduct at this stage was far more on the level of instinct. Man was in effect religious long before he was aware that he was religious. He prayed before he had attained any conscious belief in a god. We may quote the words of a competent scientist. "Investigation of the long history of mankind has disclosed no period in which the most distinctive thing about him has not been his sense of Powers or a Power, expressing itself in the universe, with which he instinctively wished to come into some sort of a satisfactory relationship. There is in man a sense of need and dependence on something without him; there is that in his being which goes out to something in the universe which he feels secures his place in it, and with which he desires to be at one. Challenged from the dawn of intelligence by the world order external to him, and impelled by his sense of need, he has committed himself to that world order in one way or another. As the initial acts of self-committal proved to be justified, man with his awakening mind made ever greater demands upon that order, and in turn began to feel its demands upon himself."[1]

Granted then that religion did not spring from mere curiosity, still less from the search for causes behind phenomena, but rather from the practical desire to enlarge and maintain life, it still remains true that the awareness of a beyond, of this unseen power behind the world, included an element of cognition; the

[1] J. Y. Simpson. *Man and the Attainment of Immortality*, p. 3.

attitude of religion had an intellectual side however rudimentary. It involved from the first some vague kind of belief however undeveloped. As man began to reflect on his religious experience and conduct, he began to draw out these beliefs and to express them in language and in turn these beliefs influenced religious practice. Though the stimulus proceeded from the environment, the specific character of the religious ideas is due to the human mind. So in the earliest periods man conceived of this presence in terms of 'mana,' that is a vague supernatural power residing in persons or things and effecting whatever was extraordinary. Later we find a stage of 'animism.' Man having come to believe that he possessed a soul, endowed objects that attracted his attention with souls like his own. Elsewhere we meet 'polytheism' or again 'henotheism.'[1] Perhaps alone among the Jews and certain Greek philosophers was evolved a genuine monotheism. For our present purpose it is unnecessary to discuss the processes by which men formulated these ideas or in what order of time they stand to one another. It is enough to insist that we must not regard them as evolving out of one another in any regular sequence. Often they are observed existing side by side. In any case animism does not pass onto polytheism or polytheism into henotheism. Rather they are distinct attempts to express the sense of a presence that is implicit from the first in man's consciousness. As he comes to reflect on his experience, he attempts however dimly and confusedly to understand it. Interpretations that in the long run fail to satisfy such as polytheism or animism are cast on one side and a new interpretation is attempted. It may be safely asserted that to man at his highest development, monotheism in some form is the only

[1] i.e., a belief that a tribe should worship only its own god, though the existence of the gods of other tribes is not denied.

interpretation that is able to satisfy the demands of reason. In a later chapter we shall have to examine carefully the validity of the mental processes by which man has come to believe in God. At present we are concerned solely with facts of history. Man has as a matter of historic truth, put these interpretations upon his experience. Of these monotheism alone is worthy of serious consideration to-day, but we shall have to face the possibility of some entirely new interpretation in the light of our modern knowledge.

It will be convenient here to meet a possible objection. Buddhism, it may be urged is a religion, but Buddhism as taught by Buddha himself expressly denies the existence of God and the value of prayer to God. We may add that Buddhism also is based on the principle that all desire is evil. The one desire is to abolish all desire and so attain to Nirvana. In answer to this objection we may appeal to the history of Buddhism. Buddha's followers have been unable to maintain their original position. Buddha himself has been raised to the rank first of the ideal and then of the divine. He has come to be worshipped and prayer is made to him. Thus his system of salvation, which attempted to make men able to dispense with religion, has ended by itself becoming a religion. Buddhists have been driven back to a belief in a personal God. In other words, their interpretation of the presence behind the visible world has proved to be unsatisfying. Their experience contained something more than Buddha's teaching allowed for and so it has had to be supplemented. Its failure is really an important piece of evidence of the inadequacy of atheism for human life and of man's inability to dispense with prayer. So too Nirvana has come to be conceived not as a purely negative ideal, the extinction of all desires, but as a state of blessed existence and as transcending all desire.

Before we consider some of the characteristics of primitive prayer, we must draw an important distinction between religion and magic, and between spell and prayer. Both alike are concerned with mysterious and unseen powers, and both express the petitionary side of life. The great difference between them is that religion approaches the unseen power in the attitude of supplication and humility, asking for help and protection, while magic claims to compel the unseen power to forward the will of the petitioner. Prayer is a request for the friendship and assistance of a superior, spells are the attempt by reciting a form of words or performing the correct action to bind or command the spirit or god to employ his power as the user wishes. Both prayer and spell are expressions of desire, both imply an attitude of expectation, both aim at enlisting the co-operation of superhuman powers, but there the similarity ceases. Religion is out to give, magic to get. The difference in spirit between them is vital. Prayer is the appeal to a power regarded as in some sense personal or able to respond to grant a request if it seem good to him. A spell effects its result in virtue of a power resident in itself or in the person who employs it. Different as these two attitudes are, we cannot deny that not only in the past but even in the present prayer and spell have been closely connected and that the line between religion and magic is hard to draw. Even among ourselves to-day prayer easily degenerates into spell when we suppose that the correct repetition of the right formula of prayer or the due performance of some religious act will automatically produce some result. When Christianity has been weakened by superstition, Masses for instance have been supposed as it were to put a certain compulsion on God. And more generally as soon as we allow ourselves to forget our moral relationship to a God of righteousness and turn to

vain repetitions or mere outward forms which have no spiritual effort behind them, religion tends to slip back into magic and prayer into spell. God becomes simply a power whom we exploit for our own ends. Hence it has been maintained not without a show of reason, that religion has been evolved out of magic and prayer out of spell and that it was only when spell were found not to work that man turned to prayer. On this theory religion and prayer might be said to have arisen from unsuccessful magic.

There can be little doubt however that this explanation is untrue and it has been generally abandoned. The true explanation is rather that both religion and magic sprang from man's initial attitude to the unseen powers of which he was aware, and became gradually differentiated as his thought and feeling became less confused. Religion never was magic nor was magic ever religion. The two attitudes are so fundamentally opposed that the one can never really become the other. When man passes from one to the other, he leaves the first behind. But there was a time when man had not yet become conscious of the difference. His attitude to the unseen power fluctuated between and he was not yet aware of the inconsistency between them. We see the same unreasonable confusion in the mind of a child or a savage to-day. When he wants something intensely, from someone who has the power to grant it, he passes from begging to scolding, from entreaty to threats and back again almost in the same breath. That is exactly the behaviour of savages to their gods. In other words the difference of mood was there from the first but man was not aware of it. Only gradually did it come to be discerned and felt as we discern and feel it to-day. Even now when we fix our attention on what we desire, we easily regress to a savage or childish mind and become unconscious of it. A large part of progress in

religion has consisted, as in other departments of life, in recognizing distinctions which had been there all the time. Only by degrees are the true principles of worship and conduct disentangled and brought out into the light. They had existed for long periods under the surface of human thought; they were implicit in religion from the beginning. But they were only slowly disengaged from much that has been discovered later on to be irrelevant or even incompatible with true religion. In short because spell and prayer were long confused in the mind of primitive man, it does not prove that they were ever the same.

We may see here an example of what is called 'dispersive evolution.' It used to be supposed that evolution proceeded along one single line of development, that so to say animals were more developed vegetables. That is now known not to be the case. Rather they both represent divergent lines of development. Some primordial organisms got fixed and turned into vegetables, others moved about and turned into animals. In the words of Bergson, the process of evolution has not "described a single course, like that of a solid ball shot from a cannon. But it proceeds rather like a shell, which suddenly bursts into fragments, which fragments, themselves being shells, burst again, and so on for a time incommensurably long."[1] Man's attitude to the mystic force behind the world of nature was at the first magico-religious but in time it diverged into religion and magic and these have gone on drawing steadily further and further apart. The true descendant of primitive magic is the modern science which seeks to obtain such knowledge of the laws and forces of nature as will compel nature to serve the purposes of man. Religion has increasingly realized that man's supreme desire must be, not that God may be persuaded to do man's will, but that man

[1] *Creative Evolution* (E. T.), p. 103.

may have the vision and strength to see and do God's will.

Such is the ideal of prayer as set before us in Christianity, but man had a long way to go before he was capable of apprehending so high an ideal. From first to last prayer is the expression of desire but the content of desire has varied enormously through the ages. Primitive man's interests are limited and almost entirely material. The tribe is engaged in the co-operative effort to get food and clothing, to multiply children and cattle and to ward off disease and the attacks of wild beasts or human enemies. Its supreme desire is for plenty and safety. These corporate desires underlie all the activity of the tribe, religion included. As it wrestles with its environment to get and retain what it values most, it seeks to enlist the sympathy and assistance of the power of whose presence it is aware. Here too there is an attitude springing from the sense of a group-unity which includes not only men but the powers whom they worship. The underlying motive is not simply " thy will be done," or " my will be done," but " our will be done." It is taken for granted that the tribe and the tribal god or gods will co-operate to bring about what is obviously desirable for the welfare of the whole community. Such an attitude plainly is magico-religious. It belongs to the period before a conscious separation has been made between religion and magic. It includes prayer but it also includes an element that is not prayer, and which could easily become spell. At this naive and unreflective stage of religion unseen powers and men form one social system and each is regarded as indispensable to the other.

As higher values emerge and other than material goods come to be desired, religion is still concerned with values. Morality is placed under the protection of the tribal god. It must be noticed that religion

is never merged in morality though they are constantly reacting on one another. They remain distinct and autonomous and often progress at different rates. Religion, partly from its natural conservatism and partly from the preservation of outgrown ideas about the gods in mythology, often lags behind. It may even become an enemy to morality when the stories about the gods and the popular devotions based on them offend the conscience and call for revision or reinterpretation. On the other hand morality divorced from religion is in danger of becoming legalistic and hard, and fails to satisfy human nature. Where, as in the Hebrew prophets, the great step is taken of identifying the power that is revealed in conscience with the presence behind the external world, progress towards a true monotheism is assured. The moral idea from its very nature is intolerant of any rival. Yet even so religion remains something distinct, quickening and inspiring the moral life. That attitude which is truly religious always includes the elements of desire and expectancy. Prayer is never superseded and the highest life is still regarded as made possible only by the co-operation of man and the divine.

Throughout history prayer of some kind is the expression of the desire to be at one with the presence behind the world in forwarding what is felt or judged to be most desirable. Among civilized peoples it is usually formulated in words. But it was not always so. Primitive man embodied his desire in action rather than words. Ritual is older than spoken prayer. The savage, it has been said, dances out his religion. When he wishes to bring something to pass, he gathers people together to perform magico-religious rites and so express by action their inmost desires. The ceremonies are the outward signs of the longings of their hearts. Ritual does not so much represent thought as desire. " Under the stress of emotion men help

out their ideas with gestures, and there is always a tendency for feelings and ideas to realize themselves in action; children commonly 'play' at that which impresses them. . . . So it is that upon the lower levels of mankind there are mimetic rites for explicit needs, whereas upon the higher levels there will be explicit prayers, and also a recognition of explicit powers to whom an appeal can be made. But all earnest, sincere activity is purposive, implying wants and aims, and the growth of knowledge and the development of religion are marked by better conceptions of the necessary factors and means to achieve success. Hence we can scarcely sever genuine purposive activity and a prayer for some effective activity."[1]

Again sacrifice, which is acted prayer, is probably older than spoken prayer. It represents the wish to get into friendly relations with the powers to which it is offered. It is not the product of mere fear which would lead rather to flight but of reverence and a feeling that the powers are approachable. Often it is the expression of the affection and gratitude of the community. Often again it is viewed as strengthening and renewing the bond of union between men and the supernatural beings in whom they believe. Because primitive religion seems to be chiefly occupied with ritual of various kinds and few prayers coming down from early times have been recorded, it does not follow that the spirit of prayer was absent.

Again the unit of early religion as of all primitive life was not the individual but the group or clan. The individual only prays as a member of the group and for blessings to be enjoyed by the group. At first the recognition of the individual as such has no place in worship. Individuality however is not denied, because it has not yet been perceived. No doubt the idea is implicit in all worship that the god cares

[1] S. A. Cook Article, "Religion." *E.R.E.* Vol. 10, p. 676.

for all his worshippers alike but this idea has not risen above the level of consciousness. This stage cannot last. It is plain that sooner or later the desires of the individual will clash with the desires and customs of the community. It is largely through such conflict that the individual comes to be aware of himself. But what is he to do and where is he to turn for help to forward the satisfaction of his private and personal desires? Even if they are innocent, he cannot bring them to the gods of the community, much less if they are anti-social. There is no place or provision for private petitions in the public worship of the tribe. To this need may be traced the rise of what is called 'fetishism.' A fetish is so to say a private god. The individual looks out for some power or spirit other than those identified with the welfare of the group and, when he supposes that he has discovered such, he strives to enlist its aid for his personal enterprises. Thus from one point of view fetishism represents a real aspect of truth which finds its place in a fully developed religion, namely that God can be approached by the individual. But it has other sides which are much less attractive. It tends easily to sink to mere magic and readily becomes anti-social. It is viewed always with suspicion if not actual hostility by religion. At a later stage religion itself finds room for private and personal prayers, but without forfeiting its essentially social character. It forbids any petitions that cannot be reconciled with the good of the community. Ideally at least the God of the whole cannot be expected to favour one member as against another.

The process cannot stay here. The merely tribal god is only after all a fetish on a bigger scale as contrasted with other tribal gods. He is the deity of a limited and exclusive community. All that has just been said applies equally here. Accordingly in the highest religions God is recognized as the God of the

whole earth, of all tribes and nations equally. Polytheism is found to be both intellectually and morally unsatisfactory. So the truth is attained that requests for merely national favours at the expense of other nations or desires for anything that conflicts with the welfare of others is absurd and cannot be reconciled with the character of the one God who cares for all alike. Side by side with this the goal of prayer is transformed. The highest object of desire is increasingly seen to be the fulfilment of the will of God Himself not merely the co-operation of God in the carrying out of the will of this man or that man or this community or that community. For in God's will all find their highest good. Here prayer reaches its highest development and of this we shall speak in the next chapter.

To sum up, there is nothing in the history of prayer that in any way impairs its claim to truth and validity. We may grant that its true principles have only slowly and by degrees been brought to light and indeed even among ourselves to-day are often misunderstood. The same might be said of all the higher departments of human activity. Men spoke long before the rules that govern correct speech were understood or formulated. They broke those rules then and they frequently break them now, but that does not alter the value of speech or prove that there are no rules. Prayer has the right to be judged by what it is at its highest and best, by what it has become not by what it began by being. Advance in the understanding and practice of prayer has not been uniform or universal. Mistakes have been made and only slowly corrected. Mistakes are still made. There have been periods of regression and decay. In times of great strain there is often the tendency to revert to discarded superstitions. At its best prayer makes great demands on human nature and men easily fall back into some

easier and more attractive form of what is really magic. Still the fact remains that it has been progressively disentangled from much that was alien to its true nature and it is possible to practise it in sincerity and truth. Throughout it expresses desire, the desire of men to realize the highest values that they are capable of apprehending, in fellowship with the power of whose presence they are aware behind the world order. If religion appears often to have kept doubtful company and to have sprung from a humble origin, let us remember that the same is true of all forms of human life and not least of science. No reasonable person would deny the value or validity of science because it is lineally descended from magic and has astrology and the like among its ancestors, or because it has repeatedly formed hypotheses which it has been obliged later to discard. So no one can legitimately challenge the worth of prayer merely because it has had a chequered history or has often been perverted. Prayer claims to be taken as seriously as any other form of universal human activity.[1]

[1] For a fuller discussion of many of the points raised in this chapter, see Dr. Jevons' two small books in the Cambridge Manuals, *The Idea of God* and *Comparative Religion :* also E. O. James, *Primitive Ritual and Belief ;* A. E. Garvie, *Tutors unto Christ.*

## CHAPTER II

### CHRISTIAN PRAYER

AS we saw, the history of prayer is the history of religion, but there have been in history many forms and kinds of prayer. They cannot all be equally true and satisfactory expressions of the impulse to pray. The Christian believes that in the life and example and teaching of Jesus Christ we see the disclosure of what prayer can be at its highest and best. He took the universal human impulse to pray and developed it and raised it to a new plane. All prayer must be tested and judged by the possibilities of prayer as revealed in and by Christ. It is, let us remember, only Christian prayer that we believe to be capable of a full and rational defence.

For our study of Christian prayer we turn first to the human example of Christ, then to His teaching on the practice of prayer and thirdly to His own response to those who made requests to Himself.

As we examine the records of His life we are struck by the surprisingly large proportion of time that He devoted to prayer. Throughout that life prayer alternated with His active labours for men. At all moments of crisis He turned to conscious communion with the Father. At His baptism, when He deliberately left behind the life of home and set Himself to embrace His vocation, He prayed (Luke iii, 21). The

reception of the Holy Spirit was followed by a long period apart in the wilderness alone with the Father in prayer and fasting, while He prepared Himself for the approaching ministry and overcame in advance the temptations to action which would conflict with the Father's will. In the strenuous days of the opening of the Galilean ministry, He deliberately turned His back on the work of teaching and healing and went apart for prayer. (e.g., Mark i, 35; vi, 46. Luke v, 15-16; ix, 18.) Before the new venture of choosing and sending out the Twelve, He spent all night in prayer (Luke vi, 12. Cp. Matthew ix, 38-39). It was while He prayed at a turning-point in His ministry, that He was transfigured. His own prayers were of such a nature that when His disciples overheard them, they asked Him to teach them to pray. (Luke xi, 1.) The evidence suggests that His miracles were in some sense answers to prayer. (Mark vi, 41; viii, 6; vii, 34; ix, 29. John xi, 41-42.) In one case He mentions that He has been interceding by name for an individual apostle. (Luke xxii, 32.) In the Gospel of St. John the so-called High-priestly prayer sums up in a characteristic act His whole attitude to the Father. Even on the Cross three at least of His utterances are prayers.

But the most illuminating study of what prayer meant to Jesus is to be found in the record of the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. The struggle lay in the moral effort to lift up His human will into complete union with the Father's will. At first He prayed that the cup of suffering might pass away from Him, subject to the Father's will being done. (Mark xiv, 36. Matthew xxvi, 39.) There was nothing of disobedience in this desire. In the Old Testament story of the sacrifice of Isaac, when Abraham's will had been surrendered, the actual sacrifice of his son was no longer demanded. It could not be in accordance

with the will of a God of righteousness that the priests and Pharisees out of spite and cruelty should put an innocent man to death and bring to a close His life of kindness and teaching. So He could in perfect loyalty appeal to the Father's love and power to deliver Him. The answer that He received to His first petition was the clear discernment that it was the Father's will that the cup should be drunk, that the suffering due to the wickedness of men should be endured not averted. In the light of this deepened knowledge of the Father's will the desire is readjusted and the prayer changed to the simple petition that the Father's purpose as now apprehended should be accomplished. The repetition of the same prayer aimed only at deepening the surrender of the will. Clearly Christ regarded the fulfilment of the Father's will as the best thing, not as the second best. The answer to the prayer as a whole lay first in the increased insight into the Father's will and then in the calmness and strength that it brought. He won new power to overcome the natural shrinking of the flesh. The spirit was strengthened. He was enabled to go forth to face the long hours of the passion and the Cross. Nowhere in the story of suffering, insult and apparent failure is there any trace of further moral struggle.[1] His will was throughout in full sympathy with the Father's purpose. His desire was solely for the Father's glory.

When we turn to the second source of light on the mind of Christ concerning prayer, namely His direct teaching, we naturally begin with the Lord's prayer. We may regard it as expressing the true Christian outlook in prayer. The order and proportion of the clauses is most instructive. The fulfilment of God's

[1] Except perhaps in the cry of desolation on the Cross (Mark xv, 34) which however as its context in the psalm shows is a cry of faith.

will and purpose fills the first place. The dominant desire is to be for the actualization on earth of a new order in which God's name or character is hallowed and in which His will is done both corporately and individually. In subordination to this follow petitions for the supplying of men's needs that they may have the strength to do the work that God has given them to do in forwarding His will: for the forgiveness of all that hinders them from fellowship with God which is the condition of such a life of service: and for spiritual power to remain faithful to God's purpose under trial. It is significant that the whole prayer is social. Throughout it is in the plural, not the singular.[1] Elsewhere He sets no limit to the power of prayer (Mark xi, 23-24. Matthew vii, 7-11; xvii, 21; xviii, 19-20). On the other hand He encourages persistence in petition till an answer is gained. If a friend in bed can be compelled to get up by repeated requests or an unjust judge can be worried onto doing justice, a fortiori a loving and righteous Father will answer His children's prayers. (Luke xi, 5-13; xviii, 1-8.) God is always waiting to give the best that He can give, but certain conditions must be fulfilled. The chief of these is faith, that is, a willingness to trust God unreservedly as a little child trusts its parents. This alone makes the full filial relation possible. Words like 'courage' and 'fear not' were always on His lips (e.g., Mark v, 36; ix, 23). His optimism and confidence were based on the character of God. Another condition of true prayer is the spirit of love and forgiveness towards fellow men, which follows from the social nature of true prayer. It is made by members of a family who are striving to live up to the conditions of family life. (Mark iii, 25. Matthew v, 23-24.) Nor is prayer a substitute for effort of

[1] For a fuller study of the Lord's Prayer cp. Gore's *Prayer and the Lord's Prayer.*

mind or body. It must be accompanied by watchfulness and obedience. God always calls for co-operation. He strengthens man by His fellowship that man may put forth the greater effort. He bestows more that He may expect more. Nowhere is there any suggestion of the false view that prayer will save trouble. (cp., Mark xiv, 38. Luke vi, 46 ff ; xii, 48 ff.)

We may now consider Christ's own behaviour towards those who made requests to Himself as disclosing in terms of human life something of God's dealing with men. He loved all men without exception but His conduct towards the individual was determined by the possibilities of the case. We never hear of Him as refusing to heal the sick or comfort the sorrowful, however busy He was. At the same time in the majority of cases He seems to have waited to have been asked to heal. On no occasion is it clear that He sought out a sufferer. At most He took the initiative when confronted with a case during His ministry. Always He required faith in Himself. At Nazareth it is actually recorded that "He could do no mighty work there because of their unbelief." (Mark vi, 5-6.) It is significant in this connection to note that in the earliest record the process of His cures is described as being gradual in certain cases. (Mark i, 26 ; viii, 23-26 ; ix, 26-27.) On one occasion He did not hesitate to delay an answer till the woman's faith had been so to say educated. (Mark vii, 24-30.) On another He did not shrink from causing the pain of a public avowal of a shameful disease and its cure. (Mark v, 33-34.) Often He sought surroundings favourable to concentration of thought. In one case He led the sufferer to frame a definite instead of a general request (Mark x, 51). All these features combine to show that prayer is based not on mechanical but on personal relations. It is far more than an isolated or casual request to one who else may be a stranger. It is conditioned through-

out by moral factors. On the one hand it must express the inward character and intention of the man who prays. On the other hand, God does not dispense favours automatically. He gives Himself in all that He gives. It is a personal donation and He can only give Himself to those who are spiritually disposed to receive Him. Prayer is governed by those laws of mutual sympathy which govern the intercourse of friends.

Two special instances call for particular attention. The first is Christ's response to the request that in imitation of Elijah, He would call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritan village which refused to receive Him and His disciples on their way to Jerusalem. (Luke ix, 51-56.) It called forth a rebuke.[1] The suggestion was in a line with the temptation to use His power to compel obedience and spare Himself the suffering involved in choosing the Father's methods for establishing the kingdom. Further it displayed a strange ignorance of Christ's character and of His unfailing love to His fellow men. Thus it contradicted the spirit of all true prayer. The only possible reply was such a reproof as might lead to a re-education of the disciples' mind.

The second instance is the petition also made by the Sons of Zebedee, perhaps under the influence of their mother that He would promise them then and there the two chief places in His kingdom. (Mark x, 35-45. Matthew xx, 20-28.) It was based on a real faith in His coming kingship just when the loyalty of many was failing. It was from one point of view a noble request, reflecting an ambition after the highest good that they could then conceive. This is reflected in the surprising gentleness of Christ's answer. But the faith was unintelligent and the form of the request

[1] The uncertainty of the text does not affect the lesson. Cp. R.V. *ad loc.*

betrayed a misunderstanding of the methods and nature of the coming kingdom. "Ye know not what ye ask." The places in the Kingdom of God are not bestowed arbitrarily but in accordance with the Father's law of righteousness. They can only be won by self-sacrifice and service. The petition was not refused but reinterpreted. The desire was re-educated and lifted up to a new level. The promise was given that on that level it would be satisfied. The early martyrdom of James and the long life and labours of John, if Church tradition can be trusted, were the true answer to the original request, an answer far beyond the spiritual imagination of those who made it at the moment of utterance but yet an answer charged with far greater and more abiding values than the literal fulfilment of the desires of which they were then conscious. God's will for James and John was fulfilled and that was something far bigger than the capricious bestowal of any temporary and earthly dignity. As they looked back, they would be able to see that their request had been more truly answered than if it had met with an immediate and literal success. The real and inner meaning of their highest desires found expression in the receiving of ability to discharge their vocation and fill their place in the purpose of God.

What then are the leading principles that emerge from this survey of Christian prayer as disclosed in the life and teaching of Christ? First of all it rests on a belief that behind all that exists and all the processes of the universe is the will of an all-wise and all-loving Father. He has called into being all persons and things, and wills for each and all their highest good. No man can love himself more than God loves him. No man can love even his nearest and dearest more than God does. There can be no more worthy object of desire than that God's kingdom in all its fulness should come and that His will should

be done. In this and in this alone all men and all communities alike can find their true satisfaction. Hence all Christian prayer has for its primary aim the direction of desire towards the fulfilment of God's will. From this it follows that no Christian can even wish, much less attempt to persuade or cajole God to change His mind or lend His divine power to forward some merely selfish end. Rather prayer is one great means for learning more truly the divine will and for co-operating with God in carrying forward that will. Its goal is the realizing of what God desires to be realized because He knows it to be best. For the carrying out of many of His purposes for this present world it would seem that God has willed to make Himself dependent on human intelligence and human effort. Further, God formed this world to be a training ground for a higher life, to be a " vale of soul-making." Men and women are to develop here the capacity for a life in conscious fellowship with God, which will find its consummation hereafter. They are to learn to love and live. But man's full life can only be developed by active communion with God and of this communion prayer is a necessary part. By working with God in dependence on His wisdom and power man can grow into his full stature. Because this relationship is a personal one it must involve more than work and action and obedience to rules. It should include conscious fellowship and sympathy and right direction of desire. To use the analogy that underlies the whole attitude and teaching of Christ, we are children in the home of a loving Father. We come to know Him by working with and for Him, but just because we are sons and daughters and not tools or slaves mere work is insufficient. There must be the mutual interplay of affection, the sharing of desire, the unity of heart and will. In all this too the social side of religion is maintained and perfected without neglecting

the worth of the individual. In the ideal family there can be no favourites, but yet the needs of every member receive due satisfaction. The working out of the world purpose is not the task of a number of separate individuals in personal dependence upon God but of the whole family making a joint effort in co-operation with the Father. His will includes the highest welfare of each and all. For the individual member to attempt to find his own good apart or outside this is to contradict the divine method. Only as he gives himself to the biggest cause in the world can he find himself.

There remains one vital consideration. God has given to man the power of choice. Love must be free or it is no longer love. True freedom can only be won by self-determination. Accordingly man is able within certain limits to thwart or hamper the divine purpose. He may refuse the moral and spiritual effort of sympathy and service and the consequences of this cannot be limited to his own life. We are members one of another. So we are confronted with the melancholy fact of sin, the alienation of will and mind and heart from God. There are corporate and national sins as well as individual sins. Hence, as in the family children must express their sorrow for disobedience and promise amendment before the old happy relation can be restored, so in the divine family there must be repentance. There is the need for prayers not only of dependence and co-operation but of penitence and amendment. In short from first to last the whole conception and scope of Christian prayer springs from and is conditioned by the Christian belief that God is a righteous and loving Father and all men are brethren. In Christ human life has been revealed as God meant it to be, and there we see a demonstration of the truth and power of prayer. As Christians we go to school with Him to learn the possibilities of prayer.

When we turn to the rest of the New Testament, we meet everywhere the same ideal of Christian prayer, namely the identifying of all the energies and powers of the self with the good purpose of God, in dependence on His loving guidance and help and in fellowship with all men and women of good will. The universal human duty and privilege of prayer is always assumed. It is regarded as unnecessary to argue about its value. There is no need to develop the point. St. Paul, for instance, shows himself unceasing in prayer both for individuals and for churches, including those which he had never visited (Phil. i, 3-11. Romans i, 9-12. Col. i, 3-4 and 9-12, etc.). In turn he counted on their prayers for himself and his work. (Phil. i, 19. Romans xv, 30-32. II Thess. iii, 1-5, etc.) He teaches that prayer and thanksgiving are a test of what is good. If anything cannot be the subject of these, it must be evil (I Cor. x, 30. Romans xiv, 6 and 23.) Men are bidden to "pray without ceasing and in everything give thanks" (I Thess. v, 17) because all life, both inward desire and outward action, is to be lifted up to the prayer level, that is, inspired by a single and consistent ambition for the glory of God. Even the satisfying of the needs of the body can be thus "done unto God." (Col. iii, 17 and 23. I Cor. x, 31.) So, too, in I John v, 14-16 the magical idea of prayer is expressly excluded. If we find then in the New Testament only exhortations to prayer and an entire absence of arguments about it or limitations of its scope, that is only a reflection of the vigorous and whole-hearted spiritual life of the primitive Christian community.

There are two further points connected with the Christian theology of prayer, both prominent in the Epistles and in the Gospel of St. John, which should be stated, though this is not the place for a full exposition or discussion of them.

First, Christian prayer is not a bare imitation of the

prayers of Jesus Christ. For Christians He is not a dead teacher but is still living and active. His life beyond the veil is a continual prayer. He is eternally giving Himself in will to the Father. So when prayer is offered " in His name " or a petition ends with the words, " through Jesus Christ our Lord," these are no barren formulas. They express even more than the wish that the prayers may represent the mind of Christ, though this is included. Christians are not only disciples but are joined to the living Christ by such closeness of union that they may be said in a real sense to be members or parts of Christ. They are " in Christ " as sharing His life, and do all things in Him. As His members they pray, and their prayers so far as their wills are one with His will, are united to and integrated with the prayer that He is ever offering. He as He lives in His heavenly activity takes them and identifies Himself with them, and, to use the language of the New Testament, as the great High Priest presents them as His own before the Father. We cannot develop the idea here. For our present purpose it is sufficient to insist that all Christian prayer is in a real sense a continuance of the prayer of Christ Himself.

Secondly, in the closest connexion with the above is the teaching that all Christian prayer is prayer in the Holy Spirit. It is through the Holy Spirit that Christ works in Christians. And the Holy Spirit is represented as prompting and inspiring prayer. (See especially Romans viii, 26-28. Eph. vi, 18.) In other words the very impulse to pray and the increased insight into the meaning of prayer which comes through praying are to be assigned to the action of God Himself in our minds. The initiative throughout lies with Him and not with us. Prayer is not the searching for a God who is reluctant to be known. The very desire to pray is God Himself in us drawing us to approach

Him. He created us for fellowship with Himself and Himself stimulates us to seek that fellowship. Here again much might be said but the subject belongs rather to the field of Christian theology.

To sum up, though the Christian doctrine of prayer has often been caricatured and though under the influence of strong passions Christians have often fallen below its standard, it is perfectly consistent both with itself and with the highest conceptions that we can form of the character of God. We must now consider objections that have been brought against it, and first those which have been brought from the side of and in the name of religion itself.[1]

[1]A full bibliography will be found at the end of the Walker Trust Essays. Two simple books on Christian Prayer are: Fosdick, *The Meaning of Prayer* and Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. See also, E. Herman, *Creative Prayer*.

## CHAPTER III

### PRAYER AND RELIGION

WE will now proceed to develop the Christian idea of prayer by examining certain objections urged against it on the plane of religion. We hope to show that these rest largely on misunderstandings or else that they involve difficulties that are not really religious at all.

Why do we need to pray, it is often asked, if God is both wise and good? He knows our needs better than we know them ourselves. He has power to supply them and, being good, will do so. To ask for benefits shows not faith but doubt. The only kind of prayer that is possible for a Christian who believes in a good God is one of simple resignation to His will. This objection, however pious it may appear, misreads God's purpose for our life here. Let us examine it. It is perfectly true that prayer is not made to teach God what we need. "Your heavenly Father knoweth what ye have need of before ye ask him." Our true needs are often very different from what we suppose and God often sees needs of which we are unaware. Nor does God's love towards us require to be stimulated by requests, like that of a selfish and sluggish parent. Nor again is God an oriental despot who must be carefully humoured into a good temper and is very insistent that his authority and his beneficence should be properly and publicly recognised.

Certain types of prayer used by some Christians may suggest these false ideas but that is because they are bad prayers not because they are Christian prayers. They gain no support from the New Testament.

Rather, if God requires prayer from us as a condition of bestowing certain of His best gifts, that is for our sakes not for His. The first blessing that all prayer brings is that it takes us into the conscious presence of God and into active personal relations with Him. Prayer is first and foremost "the ascent of the soul to God." It induces a filial intimacy with our heavenly Father. Without such personal contact our sonship would remain unrealized. Human friendships need to be kept in repair by intercourse and the same applies to friendship with God. Without prayer of some kind our relation towards Him would degenerate into one that was less than personal.

Further the limitation of Christ's power of beneficence by the faith of those to whom He ministered, shows us that God can only bestow many of His blessings in response to faith. He is waiting and willing to give them as soon as we fulfil the necessary moral conditions, but we must do our part. Prayer embodies at once the active desire of the petitioner and the sense of trust and dependence upon God which are required. Our faith does not in the least create or stimulate God's love. It is rather a response of such a kind that His love can become active towards us in new and deeper ways without infringing the moral rights of our personality, without any danger of degrading us to the level of the merely automatic. It is because we are men and women, not mere instruments or tools or receptacles, that the prayer of faith is required of us as the condition of receiving benefits, especially such as belong to our higher nature.

If it be objected that there is no need for prayer to be put into words and that a silent faith should

suffice, we may fairly reply that even if we pass over the obscure psychological question, whether thought is possible without the use of words, it is quite clear that all the thoughts and rational desires of ordinary people can only become definite and active by being expressed in words. Words are, as it were, fortresses of thought. A faith that is merely a vague and diffused feeling falls below the standard of Christian faith. It is necessary for us that our intercourse with God should be put into words in some measure at least, if it is to be real to us. Otherwise, unless we have advanced far in mystical devotion, our attention will flag. We do not deny that God reads the heart or that He can discern the true desire where prayer is badly expressed or even absent, but that does not excuse us from making our best effort to express ourselves. We want to give ourselves at our best and highest in our intercourse with Him and that, for most of us, cannot be done without words.

Again, the objection that prayer is unnecessary because God will give us whatever He knows to be best for us, might logically be followed by the argument that work is for the same reason unnecessary. God does not need our work any more than He needs our prayer. Rather both are the means through which He has willed that we should co-operate with Him and by so doing develop our characters. It may be replied that work if done in the right spirit is prayer, and that therefore spoken words apart from work are superfluous. Such time had better be spent in silent endeavour. This reply emphasizes the truth that prayer is no substitute for effort. It is not an easier alternative for work which we may choose if we feel devout. It is utterly false to the spirit of Christianity to pray for any result in ourselves or others unless we are using all our powers to achieve it. One answer is the strengthening and directing

of our powers for the task. But this is not to say that work done energetically and in the right spirit leaves no scope for prayer. It has been truly said that "we are not sent into the world primarily to work but to live. Life at the highest level of its possibilities, physical, mental and spiritual, is the end to which our work is but the means. The danger of making work the be-all and end-all is that thereby we become partial and limited by certain definite and practical aims."[1] We have all heard of the man who was born a man and died a grocer. Prayer delivers us from a similar fate. It contains the element of worship which raises devotion to work to a new plane and saves us from weariness of soul. It keeps before our minds the ideal without which labour becomes mere drudgery. It prevents us from living so as to lose all that makes life worth living. Just as a workman's love for his family or friendship for his mates keeps him human even in a life of drudgery under monotonous and depressing conditions, so our friendship with our heavenly Father can keep us human and prevent our personality from being overmastered by the machinery of life.

Granted then that the completely human attitude to God includes both prayer and work, should not we be content with quite general prayers rather than employ definite petitions? Such a view, attractive as it may be at first sight, ignores the actual working of human life. Life as it is actually lived is concerned with the detailed and the particular. Our desires are not simply for the universal good but for this and that good. We are called upon to perform not simply duty but duties. We require not only sound general principles of conduct but the prudence that is able to apply them to a given situation. To limit our intercourse with God to the universal and

[1] S. McComb in the *Walker Trust Essays on Prayer*, pp. 60–61.

the general would be in effect to shut out His full influence from life as it is actually and practically lived. Religion must be concerned with the detailed anxieties and tasks of our daily work if it is to have its full power. We need faith not in a God of vague and all-embracing goodness, but in a God who is willing to help us against this temptation or direct us in undertaking this enterprise. Otherwise faith loses its enabling power and becomes an unpractical dream. We can understand why Christ led the blind man to focus his faith on a clear cut and definite petition.

From a slightly different point of view we must also insist on the importance of bringing into the presence of God and considering in the light of His perfect goodness and truth even the trivial details of our ordinary life. If we exclude from our prayers as frivolous or unimportant the small things of life there is a danger that these will remain unsanctified. There will be a disassociation of our wills. It is by no means uncommon to find men who through prayer have consecrated their thoughts about the big things of life, who are really Christian in their attitude towards, say, social questions or missionary work, but have failed to expose to the influence of God the more homely side of their lives and have left their minor interests unconsecrated. The effect is obvious and deplorable. The true life of prayer seeks to cover the whole of our duties and interests and to bring all our relations into the light of God's presence. It is a mistake to suppose that anything is so trivial that it cannot be brought to God. No detail is in itself small. The manner of its performance may call for the expression of the greatest moral principles. And conversely the grandest laws of righteousness and love remain mere abstractions until they are embodied in individual instances. We must never judge moral

and spiritual values by mere size. God is the God of the microscope no less than the telescope.

A further question begins to raise issues which involve science and philosophy. There are many who are convinced of the value of prayer for spiritual blessings but who doubt the efficacy of prayer for material blessings. In a later chapter we shall have to consider this issue from another point of view.[1] Here we will only regard it from the side of religion. This limitation of the scope of prayer gains no support from the teaching and example of Christ. "Give us this day our daily bread" is a definite petition for material needs put into the model prayer. All that Christ insists is that such petition must be subordinated to a spiritual purpose. To be in accordance with God's will it must be for such things as are necessary for the due performance of our work in life No encouragement is given to ambition for great wealth or luxury or for the pursuit of gain at the expense of others. This distinction between material and spiritual is not really relevant to a religion that includes the whole man. A religion of the Incarnation and a religion that includes sacraments cannot be hostile to or neglectful of material well being. We could neither pray nor serve God at all without the due supply of those things that minister to the needs of the body which He has given to us. The vital distinction for religion is not between what is material and what is spiritual, but between what God wills and what He does not will. A material request may be most spiritual if it is for God's glory, and a spiritual request may be utterly devilish. We dare not attempt to be more spiritual than Christ Himself. Of course we may discover that the physical world is so governed by laws that to pray for material benefits is to fly in the face of truth and knowledge. If so, then such

[1] See the following chapter.

prayers would be unchristian. That is a question that we shall have to face later. At present all that we are concerned to maintain is that from the point of view of religion no valid objection can be raised to them.

It is sometimes argued that to pray for particular persons or causes is unfair because it involves the attempt to get an advantage for them that others do not enjoy. We meet this in the same way. Precisely the same objection might be brought against all acts of service or kindness. By helping or giving to one do we not put him at an advantage over another ? Is it fair to assist one if we cannot assist all ? Logically this argument would prevent us from any act of mercy or kindness. The answer is that as a result of our station in life we clearly have special duties to particular persons which we cannot and do not have to all. It is quite true that it is often a real problem to know how best to divide our alms or our service. We possess only a limited amount of time and money and strength. But that does not in the least excuse us from taking the trouble to form some estimate of the relative needs and claims of particular objects, and this will almost certainly include certain individuals. It is reasonable to believe that God will have given to other Christians similar responsibilities, and that if they fulfil these, then the needs of all will be equally met. Because my resources are limited, that is no excuse for not trying to make the best of them and expecting that they will be supplemented by those of others. So with prayer, obviously we can only pray for a limited number of particular people or causes by name or in detail. We must use spiritual common sense to decide who and what these shall be. Further our prayer is always that God's will for all and each may be done. With Him there is no favouritism. He wills the highest good of all alike.

If this be remembered, that there can be no unfairness with God, no prayer can even desire to benefit one at the expense of another, and the issue is in God's hands.

Another line of objection is based on unanswered prayers. We must begin by considering the nature of the prayers that remain unanswered. Obviously prayer is not a means of getting any object that we may happen to fancy at a few moments' notice. As children we probably found that prayer for a new toy or a box of chocolates produced no results whatever. And many of the prayers of grown up persons are equally childish. They regard life purely from the view of their own pleasure or comfort. They are attempts, however innocent, to make use of God for merely personal convenience. That such prayers should remain unanswered is no difficulty at all.

Again if we believe that God is all-wise and all-loving, there are many requests which we should expect Him to refuse, at least in the form in which they are made. In an earthly home a child often asks for what the Father's wider vision and knowledge sees to be inexpedient or dangerous. So God often denies what our shortsighted prayers explicitly desire, simply because He is wise and good. In the same manner He often holds back a blessing till we are spiritually ready for it. If all blessings are conditioned by faith, our faith may not yet be strong enough and the very delay may be the means of strengthening it. God may be able to grant much at the end which He could not have granted at the beginning without endangering our spiritual development. At the close of the parable of The Unjust Judge which inculcated the lesson of persistence in prayer, we are told that the story illustrates the truth that God is long suffering over His elect which cry to Him day and night. (Luke xviii, 7). The word employed is used by St. James

(v, 7) of a farmer patiently waiting for the growth of his harvest. It suggests that the prayer will not fail but that the full answer will only be given in due time. The immediate answer is to foster the conditions which will make this possible.

The saints also tell us that one answer to prayer may be the definite assurance that the answer desired is not in accordance with God's will. From one point of view Christ's first prayer in Gethsemane was refused. So too was St. Paul's petition for the removal of the thorn in the flesh. But in a far truer sense both prayers were answered. Christ was enabled to see deeper into the Father's will and to do it. St. Paul was endowed with grace to bear his weakness. God's will was done but not in the way that was first desired. So too with the request of the sons of Zebedee, the prayer was refused in so far as it expressed the desire for rapid and worldly promotion. It was answered in that the disciples were both kept safe to accomplish the task allotted to them in God's kingdom. God's standard of values is not that of the world or even that of the ordinary Christian. Many prayers that appear at first sight to have remained unanswered, have in reality received a far grander answer than was ever dreamed of by the petitioner at the moment of praying. Many a mother, for instance, prayed for her son to be preserved alive in the war. It was a perfectly lawful desire. For a young life to be cut short by the hatred of enemies was not God's will. Yet the son was killed. The prayer however was not unanswered. God was able to turn even the wrath of man to His praise. If the son was enabled to do his duty without flinching and to face suffering and death, that was a true answer to prayer and a higher answer even than that which was sought in the words which were uttered. The son's real self was kept safe. The wickedness of men was over-ruled to be the means

and occasion of a supreme moral triumph. Better such a death than a survival at the cost of cowardice or sloth. Under the unideal conditions of an actually existing sinful world no greater blessing could be bestowed. The implied condition of all Christian prayer is always "nevertheless not my will but thine be done." The lesson of the Cross must never be forgotten.

From this standpoint no special difficulty attaches to opposite and conflicting prayers, at least from the theoretical side. Let us take an extreme instance. In the late war Mass was said with equal earnestness by French and German priests before battle. Both sides prayed for their country, and, provided that they believed that their cause was just, it was their duty to do so. But if they prayed as Christians, not merely as French or Germans, there was always implicit in their prayers the desire that the issue of the battle might be to the greater glory of God. The task to which their country at that hour was being called might conceivably be to serve God by bearing the cross of defeat or failure rather than by the more attractive road of victory. The supremely important thing was that His purpose should be forwarded, and under the conditions of a sinful world that has often and must often mean suffering and loss. If there was no implicit will that God's will should be done at all costs, such prayers were not Christian at all. Pagan prayers do not become Christian by employing Christian phrases, or because they happen to be offered at a Christian altar.

Another point which deserves emphasis, though it follows from what we have already said, is that many blessings which God is willing to bestow are held up or prevented because He will never force man's power of free choice. Many petitions that are indisputably good and in complete harmony with the will of God,

remain unanswered because some human will or wills refuse to co-operate with the divine purpose. It may be the moral sloth or perverse will of the man himself who offers the prayer, which blinds him from recognizing the right method of action or holds him back from making the necessary effort. No intensity of prayer is a substitute for action where action is God's will. Or the full answer may call for the right conduct of others and these may fail to do their part. As the Cross of Christ shows, the moral government of the world and the solidarity of mankind may cause God to permit the temporary triumph of the wicked and the apparent defeat of the righteous. The consequences of folly and sin cannot be limited to the guilty parties. The suffering that disobedience involves spreads far and wide, through the social nature of all human life. All the greatest blessings that we enjoy come through the corporate life of men. We cannot complain if we share the disadvantages also. What God can do is to give strength to the innocent to endure failure and suffering, and to overrule apparent disaster to some good purpose. The Cross was turned into the means of God's greatest triumph in the Resurrection and all its fruits. So long as the present world order lasts and disobedient wills oppose and thwart the divine purpose, not only right action, but right prayer will continue to fail to accomplish the desired end. Yet we believe that in the long run neither will have been found to have been wasted.[1]

To sum up, on the Christian hypothesis unanswered prayers raise no more difficulties than the frequent failure of good and noble schemes and actions. In both cases the cause may be found in the lack of full

[1] It is also reasonable to believe that in certain striking cases of visible and unmistakable answers to prayers we are allowed to gain an insight into God's methods of working, in order to encourage our faith where we cannot see any visible answer to prayer.

sympathy with and comprehension of the divine purpose, in human frailty or short-sightedness, or in the opposition of wills hostile to God. Since these failures do not lead us to give up acting, there is no good reason why they should lead us to despair of prayer. In both cases we get light and hope from the example and the cross of Christ Himself.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRAYER AND SCIENCE

WE are often told that science has disproved the reasonableness of prayer. This claim we must now proceed to investigate. On what grounds is it based?

Science, we are told, has demonstrated that the world in which we live is governed by rigid and invariable laws. These leave no room for any interference by God in answer to prayer. Prayer was natural in a prescientific age so long as man was still unaware of the causes of events. Now that we know how things happen, prayer is no longer required and indeed is absurd. In old days, to give a clear instance, when pestilence occurred, men resorted to prayer. The method was not always very successful. No doubt it brought a certain amount of comfort to the stricken population. A strong faith may even have preserved some from infection or stimulated the power of recovery. But the death-rate was enormous. To-day science has effected what prayer was not able to effect. Sanitation and disinfectants based on the discovery of the causes of the disease have largely banished pestilence. Men have learned to look to their drains rather than to litanies, and in consequence the death-rate has been almost incredibly diminished. And this instance is only typical of a vast field of human life. While we were ignorant of the laws that control the sequence

of events, we were free to imagine the intervention of supernatural agents or powers. Now that science can explain what was formerly inexplicable, there is no room left for their action. Everything happens in accordance with laws and it is foolish even to desire that these should be changed or suspended. The realm of the unknown and mysterious, in which it is still possible to suppose that prayer may take effect, is getting less every year with the advance of scientific discovery. The supernatural is being pushed further and further back until there is every reason to expect that it will be altogether banished. Every department of life will be seen to be entirely subject to law. Moreover if this conception be extended, as some scientists claim to extend it, so as to cover the whole field of knowledge and experience, science will in time be able to present us with the picture of a self-sufficient universe, running like some great machine. Such a universe makes any belief in God unnecessary. It is, as it were, self-contained. In the light of this picture petition and intercession become ridiculous. The idea of a heavenly Father must be replaced by that of physical and chemical processes and the idea of a purpose of love by that of a completely determined system of iron necessity.

Such objections as these, all the more formidable because they are often not thought out and carried to their logical conclusion, or are veiled in semi-poetical language, are widespread and must be faced. To find a satisfactory reply, we must get to the heart of the matter and scrutinize closely the whole nature and function of science.

The origin of all science is to be found in man's desire, at first perhaps largely unconscious, to understand and use his environment for his own purposes, For this end he wishes to manipulate the forces of nature and to predict its course. He seeks to learn

how things act and what they may be expected to do next. Unconsciously he assumes that to some degree at least there is a rational order behind the world. Any form of life would be impossible if, let us say, water refreshed the body one day and poisoned it the next. This knowledge can only be got by observation and by reflection on what is observed, so as to be able to direct future action. If this is to be successful it is plainly necessary to be able to recognize objects and situations. If a similar event to one that I have already observed recurs, I must be able to identify it and employ it as a sign of what I may expect to happen next. I want some means of formulating conditions and describing them so that I can recall them myself and make them intelligible to my fellow men. For let us remember that science, like religion, goes back to social and not merely individual needs. In face of the world the tribe seeks the satisfaction of common needs by common means and for that reason the objects and processes concerned with the pursuit of such common ends must be intelligible in some way to all. In other words man when once he has risen above the level of mere instinct, cannot progress very far without some general ideas and some attempt, however crude, to formulate and understand the causal connexions of things in order that he may anticipate their actions and divert them to his own use.

It is true that primitive man made many mistakes. He thought that he saw connexions where he found later that none existed. Much early science seems to us merely ridiculous, but that is only because it has been disproved by later experience. We saw that magic is one form of primitive science. If man in the face of the world came to believe that there were unseen powers behind the visible world there was nothing irrational in trying to compel their help if suitable means could be found for doing it. Nor

again is there anything intrinsically absurd in supposing that by whistling you can produce wind, just as by lighting a fire you can produce heat. Only experience can show that the one belief is scientifically true and the other is unfounded. Conversely to a savage a gun is at first sight a piece of magic. Only by education he learns the means by which the trick is done. The unsatisfactoriness of magic lies in the fact that it is found often not to work, and that as experience and knowledge grow it becomes increasingly difficult to fit it in with the rational scheme of the universe. There is however no evidence that the mind of primitive man was in its essential processes different from our own. What he lacked was both the cumulative experience of the past and the proper scientific method. Only slowly did science in the strict sense purge itself from magic. What we need to insist on is that its primary aim it has all along been practical. This has dominated its course and determined its character. It is true that in the course of time a secondary aim has entered increasingly into all scientific research, namely the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, and indeed from the very first the instinct of curiosity has played a large part in stimulating human behaviour. But always, even to-day, the primary aim of science is practical and utilitarian, namely to achieve the mastery of the world.

In all branches of science the method is one and the same. It begins by marking out a certain portion of experience as its province. It abstracts from the total field of experience only those aspects and relations of things which it regards as relevant to the business in hand. All others it resolutely ignores. Thus the physicist pays attention only to those aspects of things which can be expressed in terms of matter and motion. A stone is for him only so much ponderable matter. He deliberately neglects its colour, shape,

geological formation and the like, in fact all those points about it which would interest the artist or the mineralogist. Each science sets out to collect and record those phenomena which fall within its own province and to sift them out of the mass of irrelevant material. The means that it employs are observation and, where possible, experiment. When it has collected its data, it sets to work to classify and group them and to reduce them to orderly sequences. It then seeks to discover some formula or law which will describe these groups and sequences in the most convenient and comprehensive manner. This formula may be purely conceptual in character, that is it may employ terms or concepts invented by the scientists but having as far as we know no actual existence in the world of nature. For instance, in geometry mathematicians use a symbol to represent a straight line, the shortest possible distance between two points, though in nature there are no mathematically straight lines. No one has ever seen one or is able to draw one. The symbol is an aid to imagination and memory and enables us to make calculations which are practically useful. So, too, in physics ideas like ' force,' ' ether ' and ' electron ' are in the same way conceptual symbols used to facilitate clearness of thought and proving their value by the practical results which they facilitate. They enable the physicist to explain certain facts of experience to group them under general laws and to predict future events. Such conceptual symbols justify themselves so far as they are useful and make it possible to foretell what will be found to happen in future experiments and observations. If they are found unsatisfactory they are at once modified or discarded and a new substitute is invented which will be in accordance with the newly discovered phenomena. Thus their truth is always regarded as provisional. They afford the best means of expressing the results of investigation

up to date. If, however, they are found always to agree with the facts of experience over a large field and, what is even more important, to be applicable to wider fields than those for which they were originally invented, then they come to be regarded as corresponding in large measure at least to the nature of reality. But even in such cases we must insist strongly on the vital difference between phenomenal and conceptual existence. Phenomena are facts of experience, things which have been and can be actually verified by observation and experiment. Concepts are invented of necessity by the scientific imagination to fill up gaps in knowledge. Their existence cannot be verified by the senses. They have been devised as a sort of language in which to describe and explain what underlies and connects the facts of experience and to make possible common research. Their value lies in their practical utility. Indeed that is the sole test by which science can judge them.[1]

At this stage we must also draw attention to the fact that the scientist makes certain assumptions which certainly are not the result of direct observation. In order that the description and prediction of events may be possible, he postulates the uniformity of nature and acts on the practical assumption that similar causes will produce similar effects. Such beliefs rest in the last resort on an act of faith. They cannot be proved. At the same time in some form or other, as we saw, they are implied in all forms of thought or action. Yet when stated they are by no means obvious. Nature at first sight is by no means uniform. Science adopts these assumptions, finds that they work and regards them as so far verified by the results which their adoption makes possible.

The above summary account of the aims and method

[1] For a simple statement of the methods of Science, see Prof. J. Thomson's *Introduction to Science* (Home University Library).

of science makes it clear that the statement that science has disproved the possibility of prayer needs criticism. To begin with, ' science,' is what is called a ' blanket ' term. There is no one science. There are many branches of science. The word covers a large variety of distinct sciences using a common method but at present far from forming a single unified system of knowledge. In popular speech the term usually means what is strictly called ' natural science.' If we ask what is meant by the ' Nature ' which it studies, the best answer is perhaps " that which we observe in perception through the senses." This answer deliberately levels away as irrelevant to natural science all differences between inanimate and animate beings, all feelings in our own minds, all sense of beauty or moral worth. The nature which such science investigates is regarded as a world existing in its own right quite independently of any attitude of ours towards it, or indeed of human perception at all. Such natural science would include mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. But as we shall see later, when we get to biology new difficulties begin to emerge. When we pass on to psychology, which claims to be a science, fresh complications occur. In our present chapter when we speak of science, we shall have in mind natural science, since it is from that quarter that the objection to prayer is most strongly urged.

We may begin by calling attention to the limitations that beset any branch of natural science, or indeed all branches of natural science taken together, as a result of that very method by which they have gained their marvellous success. They deal only with portions of experience, portions deliberately and rightly extracted and viewed in separation from the whole. The uniformities which they discover hold good in that particular portion considered in abstraction, but it does not necessarily follow that they will continue to hold

good in the concrete facts of actual experience, so soon as those elements which were abstracted are allowed to return and receive equal consideration. Let us take a simple illustration from that most abstract of all sciences, mathematics. This tells us that twice two is four. That is a truth unconditionally true always for all intelligences. But it is plain that in the world of actual existence two is a mere abstraction. We find only two objects or two apples or two shillings or whatever it may be. Accordingly in actual life it makes all the difference what the various objects are to which the law twice two is four is applied. It is only true when they are objects of the same kind in relation to the purpose in hand. Thus two shillings plus two pennies make four coins but not four shillings. If we are only interested in the number of coins the statement twice two is four still holds good. If we are concerned to discover how much we can buy with them, new considerations foreign to the pure mathematician come into play, and we learn that the four coins do not buy twice as much as the two shillings. The law twice two is four is not broken or suspended but it is seen to be in itself a pure abstraction. Whether it is true in any particular concrete case depends on circumstances which lie outside pure mathematics.

If once we have grasped the abstract nature of any science, we see that even if such science has succeeded in describing certain aspects of the world in terms of mechanical laws, it does not in the least follow that its conclusions are absolutely and unconditionally valid for the universe considered in its totality. Still less are we justified in assuming that any system of conceptual symbols which has proved its utility for scientific calculations, corresponds so completely with and gives such an exhaustive picture of ultimate reality that we are to take it as a pure and final account of the universe. To convert scientific postulates and doc-

trines into philosophical doctrines unconditionally applicable to all fields of experience is to take a step which neither the nature or method of science warrant. In short to extend to the whole world the mechanical view which is found to work in physics or chemistry and to proclaim it as an ultimate truth, is an illegitimate deduction from the consideration of certain limited aspects and portions of experience designedly taken out of all relation to the rest of experience. If, forgetting their self-imposed limitations, certain scientists, because they are unable to discover mind and spontaneity in the world that they study, proclaim that such nowhere exist, they must be reminded that they do not find them in their studies, not because they are not real, but because they have already abstracted them.

Further, science has certain other obvious limitations. In so far as it succeeds in bringing the world under the reign of its laws, it describes and formulates it rather than explains it. It can furnish no answer to ultimate questions. The very existence of the world is still a mystery. Whence did it take its beginning? What was the origin of those ultimate elements into which science reduces it, or of the laws that govern it? How comes it that particles of matter have the power to combine into that wonderful diversity which characterizes the world as we perceive it? Or, to look at it from the other end, What does all this world-process mean? Why should it happen at all? What purpose does it serve? To these and similar questionings natural science can return no answer. It may rightly plead that it is not its business to give an answer. But consider what this admission implies. Such questions may legitimately be addressed to any theory that claims to give an account of the world. The refusal to deal with them is a confession that they lie outside its province. Science cannot therefore

rightly criticize or deny the answers given by philosophy or religion except so far as they conflict with its proved results. In other words, science is obliged to confess that its explanation of the world is at best partial and not ultimate, that it deals only with a fragment of experience and that its data are only one element among many in a larger whole. Hence it cannot either affirm or deny the religious belief that everything that exists proceeds from the will of God or that behind this world process lies a purpose of wisdom and love. No explanation can really satisfy the human mind which does not include the idea of purpose; and we can rest in the idea of an intelligent will as the ultimate source and ground of all existence, as we can rest in nothing else.

For our present purpose we must also point out a danger that lurks in all the attempts of science to reduce the world to its simplest terms and to give a quasi-mathematical and mechanical interpretation of all things. This is the minimizing or even the denial of real differences, or the attempt to explain them away. Many forms of naturalism end by reducing all qualities and varieties of life to the dead level of a single type, by interpreting the more developed by the less developed and by forcing all facts into harmony with a preconceived mechanical theory. The fallacy is detected when we pass from one order of existence to another, as from inorganic nature to living things, or from the animal level to self-consciousness in man. Both life and self-consciousness emerge from conditions in which they cannot be detected. To regard them as fully expressible in terms of these inorganic and non-self-conscious conditions is to leave out the very facts which demand explanation. The changes are there: new and distinctive characteristics have emerged. To insist on treating them as on a level with the old and to refuse to recognize the transition from one order

to another is wilful blindness. It only serves to show that prejudices are not limited to theologians.

Moreover, the progress of science itself has of late years led increasingly to a revolt against the attempt to account for the phenomena of life by mechanical or chemical explanations. Biology has developed and won its place as a separate and autonomous science. Till comparatively recently biology had been working with the concepts and categories which it had taken over from physics and chemistry. It proceeded on the assumption that the organic processes which it studied were only very complex examples of the mechanical and chemical processes to be found in inorganic bodies. The explanations which were given of them were accordingly on mechanical lines. Vital processes were reduced to the relations and movements of material particles. But increased and concentrated research has succeeded in proving the unsatisfactory nature of this hypothesis. Closer familiarity with the processes of organic life has shown that they cannot be adequately stated in mechanical terms and merely physical categories. Accordingly biology has been driven increasingly to emancipate itself from the mechanistic tradition, to invent its own concepts and categories as alone being adequate and appropriate to express and describe the facts of life which are its special province. For instance, in many of the lower animals, if a part of the organism is lost or injured a new part is grown to make good the loss or mutilation of the old. The organism is found to be a systematic whole, building itself up by appropriating material from its environment, responding to changes in that environment by adaptive processes and regulating and co-ordinating the actions of all its parts in the interests of the whole organism. Such processes cannot be expressed in purely chemical or mechanical terms. They belong to a new and higher order of

being. The relations between the organism and its environment are teleological. That is, they involve the idea of purpose. In short, science itself has discovered that the idea of purposive activity is an essential part of experience and cannot be reduced to anything lower.

Before proceeding to apply the above considerations to the practice of prayer, we must draw attention to two more points. First, the meaning of the so-called laws of nature and secondly the problem of the individual.

From the above account of the methods of science it is plain that the laws of science are simply observed uniformities. They describe what is, not what ought to be or what must be. They employ the indicative, not the imperative. It is a mistake to treat them as though they were living forces or even divine powers able to compel obedience to themselves. It is misleading to treat them, without serious qualification, as ordinances of God or expressions of His divine will or a code of legislation imposed on something standing over against Himself. We must distinguish between the use of the word 'law' to denote a rule of conduct enjoined by some authority, and what, we are told, is really the earlier use of the term, to denote simply 'custom,' what is always done. The scientific use of the term is akin to this earlier use. The "laws of nature" are generalizations from past experience; they are often little more than definitions. Their great practical value as a summary of past experience cannot be disputed, but they only describe the forms of natural processes. They cannot provide any ultimate explanation of the processes themselves. As knowledge accumulates they may need to be remodelled. The formula that they employ shares the limitation of all scientific method: it is always selective and inexhaustive, emphasising some aspects of phenomena and

deliberately neglecting others, which are there not one bit less because they can be neglected for this or that particular purpose.

Again, what kind of necessity do we imply when we say the same cause must always produce the same effect? An enormous amount of ambiguity underlies the popular use of the word 'cause.' Strictly speaking the cause of any given event is the sum total of conditions positive and negative which preceded it. We often pick out some one new condition, possibly one that we have ourselves produced, and say that that is the cause of the event. This is far from correct. It assumes that all the other required conditions were already there and remain. Though we take their presence for granted they are as much the cause of the event as the one which we contributed or picked out to dignify by the title of the cause. For practical purposes our assumption is no doubt usually sufficiently accurate. If a man drinks prussic acid, it is not seriously misleading to say that the acid is the cause of his death. But if we say that the striking of a match on the box is the cause of its ignition, the failure to get a light if the air is too damp reminds us that atmospheric conditions are equally a cause of our customary success. If we press this point we are driven to the conclusion that the sum total of conditions positive and negative required before the event can occur become almost identical with the event. It is most difficult to draw a line between antecedent conditions and the event itself. We are left with little more than the principle of identity. Thus the scientist can describe what happens in a thunderstorm. He breaks it up into various elements. He can prove that when one or other of the required conditions is not fulfilled the thunderstorm does not occur. But what is the difference, in actual happening, between the arrival of all the conditions required for the production of the

storm and the thunderstorm itself? Until he knows that the totality of these conditions is present, he cannot be absolutely certain that the storm will mature, and by the time that he has observed that they are all present, the storm is already upon us. It is clear therefore that the kind of necessity implied in the statement that the same cause must always produce the same effect is not logical necessity. In the above instances the effects which follow on certain actions under certain conditions could not have been discovered by any purely intellectual processes. They have only been learnt by actual experience. The belief that they will always happen again under the same conditions is really an act of faith in the rationality of the universe. Only on such a belief is research or indeed any kind of action possible. The fact that the belief works is its justification.

Nor again do the methods of science prove equally successful in all fields. Generally speaking it is most successful when it is dealing with the most abstract subjects, and in proportion as it has parted company furthest from the living and concrete world. In mathematics and mechanics laws can be stated with the utmost precision and predictions made with remarkable success. These are just those fields where the resultant is most clearly a new form of the components. So too in chemistry exact measurements can be taken and complete analyses made, but because the conditions are more complicated and the subject matter more concrete, the success gained, though surprisingly great, is less complete. In biology difficulties increase and the area of greatest certainty is where chemical and physical methods are applied to chemical and physical processes connected with the life of the organism. But, as we saw, chemical and physical concepts are inadequate for the full and final description of the phenomena of organic life, and equally the laws of

chemistry and physics give an inadequate and even misleading account of the behaviour of living things. Biology rightly attempts to frame its own laws, but it has to admit that on many points they are tentative and provisional and too exact prediction is hazardous. When we pass to psychology and sociology, that is the endeavour to give a scientific account of human behaviour, we shall find that their laws, though not without practical value, fall very short of mathematical or mechanical certainty. The phenomena increasingly refuse as we go up the scale to yield to this type of explanation. This may well be due partly to the increased complexity of the subject matter, but it may also be due to the fact that the method is not fully adequate to comprehend reality. Thus natural law is a summary of what we know by experience to have happened and according to which we determine future action. It is not an unconditional truth and its adequacy varies with the concreteness of the facts to which it is applied.

Conversely, if we start from the individual, the limitations of the kind of knowledge that science can offer us become no less apparent. From its very nature it is compelled to treat the individual as, so to say, the meeting point of a number of universal laws which by their combination make it what it is. Its uniqueness as an individual disappears. Science regards the individual as a specimen of the particular class that it is at the moment investigating, identical with any other specimen. It does not ignore differences; on the contrary it strives to observe them but it is obliged to treat the individuality of the specimen as consisting only in the selection and arrangement in varying proportion of particular features shared in common by a whole number of objects. Its whole proceedings are based on the working assumption that the universe is composed of classes of objects composed of identical

constituents. To take an illustration, the botanist draws a rose and says that this will stand for all roses. As a matter of literal fact it represents exactly no one particular rose. It represents an abstract universal. When we study the actual rose growing in the garden we find that it is unlike all other roses, it has a form and character of its own. But science ignores all these differences and regards them all and each as embodiments of the abstract idea of rose. About this abstract idea it tells us many things which are of great importance and could not have been discovered by any other method, but such knowledge does not succeed in penetrating down to the constitutive uniqueness of the individual rose. In actual fact we never pick the rose of the botanist. What we perceive with our senses is this or that rose. And, so far as we can tell, no two are ever exactly alike. So the world consisting of a number of classes of objects or parts and aspects of objects, all identical and interchangeable, is only a useful fiction of the scientific imagination. In the living actual world from which we start at most we find certain standard types to which particular specimens more or less approximate. The knowledge which science gives falls far short of full and complete knowledge of the individual. Its apparent uniformity is due to practical necessity which is compelled to neglect differences. For reasons of convenience science makes nature uniform where in experience it is not. Once again we are compelled to acknowledge that the explanation of the world offered by science is, for all its practical value, philosophically incomplete.[1]

We may now begin to apply these considerations to the idea of prayer.

If we accept the above account, it is plain that prayer can never conflict with the laws of nature. It is sheer

[1] This illustration is taken from B. Croce's *Logic as the Science of the Pure Concept* (E. T.), p. 34 ff.

nonsense to speak of such laws ever being violated. Such as they are they can never be suspended or broken. What may happen is that by our action or our prayer we may introduce a new situation, we may add a new antecedent to the sum-total of conditions which produce a possibly unexpected result. But the uniformity is not broken. The old conditions have now ceased to exist. A new effect follows because there is a new cause. There is a fresh consequent because there is at least one fresh antecedent. When we observe a stone falling to the ground, we explain its fall by the law of gravitation. When we see an aeroplane up in the sky, we do not complain that the law of gravitation is broken. Rather it is being used. We regard it as only one instance of the way in which man utilizes, or if you will, interferes in the physical order around him. We saw that the primary motive of all science is action. We strive to understand the world in order that we may direct natural forces to the accomplishment of desired ends. In other words the very existence and progress of science involves the belief that human action can modify the natural order. We have only to look out of our windows to discover that the present appearance of this earth has been largely determined by the needs and desires of man. If that is not interference with the order of nature, what is? Many of the results of this interference might have seemed improbable enough. Who could have imagined say, St. Paul's Cathedral or the slums of South London? The more we understand and obey the laws of nature the more we can adapt and direct her processes. If we with our limited knowledge and power can do this, why should not God be able to do the same, the more so because He is the originator and sustainer of all that is? There is no reason why in answer to prayer He should not utilize existing and ever acting laws. As Sir Oliver Lodge has said, as far as the infringement of

laws is concerned, it is no more unscientific to pray to God for rain than to tell the gardener to water the garden. In answering such petitions He is not abrogating the laws which He has made, rather He is employing them so as to subserve His own purpose. It would be absurd to suppose that while man's discovery of the uniformities of nature increases His own power of manipulating nature with success, it at the same time forbids him to believe that God can direct the same forces of nature to make possible benefits which it is His will to bestow. Unless we hold that science has made impossible any belief in human free-will, which is really to raise a question that lies outside the scope of abstract science and belongs to philosophy, we have every reason for believing in divine freedom. As long as we continue to act and to criticize and attempt to influence the actions of others, we have equal right to continue to pray.

Nor again can we rest content with a sharp division between prayers for spiritual blessings and prayers for material blessings, or accept the proposition that a spiritual cause can only produce a spiritual result while a physical cause is needed for a physical result. This is a quite unreal abstraction. In the actual concrete happening the two are inextricably intertwined. Thus it has been argued that it is reasonable for a mother to pray that her son's life may be spared in a battle because the bullets are fired by human agency. God could not deflect the bullet when it had been once fired so that it should not pursue its inevitable course under the given conditions, but He might be supposed to affect the mind of the man who fired it so as to turn it aside to however small a degree from the son or again He might influence the son to move however slightly to one side. Such an argument rests on an abstract distinction which it is very hard to carry through consistently. The individual situation in-

cludes both human and non-human factors, and what situation does not ? At every stage, from the man who made the gun and the man who moulded the bullet down to the man at whom it is aimed, human elements come in. Indeed where can we find any important fact of concrete experience such as might be made the subject of prayer, which does not introduce at some point and to some degree however indirectly human influence ? Only in such studies as those of astronomy or geology or certain types of natural history can human influence be entirely excluded. A phenomenon like an earthquake which seriously affects the well being of man does seem to lie outside all human control, but even here the activities and position of the people at the moment of the shock have everything to do with the actual result. We may some day be able to predict earthquakes and to make provision against their ravages. And if man can now employ explosive forces to serve his own ends, why should not God be able to control the explosive forces of nature ?

To take an extreme instance. The question is often asked whether prayer for the weather is reasonable, since it is determined by physical laws. But apart from the fact that human conduct can over long periods of time change climate by planting or cutting forests, there are sound scientific grounds for asserting that human action can modify the atmospheric conditions. The opinion of Sir George Stokes is often quoted. " Does our physical knowledge authorize us in saying that the course of the weather is as much fixed as that of the planets in their orbits ? I doubt it. There is much tending to show that the state of the atmosphere depends a good deal upon a condition of unstable equilibrium. . . . Now the character of unstable equilibrium is, that it is a condition in which the slightest disturbing cause will suffice to start a movement which goes on accumulating till it produces a complete altera-

tion of position. It is perfectly conceivable that a child, by lighting a bonfire, might produce an ascending current of air which in particular cases might suffice to initiate a movement which went on accumulating till it caused the condition of the atmosphere to be widely different from what it would have been had the child not acted as I have supposed. It is not, therefore by any means certain that the condition of the weather is solely determined by physical conditions the effect of which could even conceivably be calculated beforehand. Hence it is conceivable that a change in the future of the weather might be made without any interference with the physical laws actually in operation."

We must however go deeper. Both Christianity and science postulate that the universe is a universe of order. Indeed no moral or purposive action would be possible at all unless for practical purposes we could depend on a regular sequence of events. Life would be mere chaos. There must be uniformity within limits if we are to cook a meal or form a character. The real point in debate is the kind of order that we postulate. Must the ultimate order be throughout exactly of that sort which natural science represents? It is no doubt true that our human minds as they deal with some vast problem of organization or wide field of facts, find it necessary to classify facts and objects under headings and to lay down for ourselves general rules of conduct. We can only be orderly by acting according to rule and by grouping and ticketing with names the various materials with which we deal. But there is no reason to suppose that God's mind is equally limited, so that He can only employ these principles and that His action in the world cannot be rational and orderly, unless He works according to fixed rules and divides up creation into classes of identical objects. That kind of orderliness springs from human weakness.

It is not the highest kind. It is forced to minimize or ignore individuality. Rules are general and abstract: facts are concrete. A rule enforces sameness in spite of differences. It cannot deal with each case on its merits, as a unique fact. But the mind of God cannot be supposed to overlook details or to ignore individuality. He has no need of the clumsy device of fictitious generalizations. He is fully aware of and rejoices in the wealth of diversity which the world contains. He treats each object and each situation as unique. Thus we regard the universe not as a standardized machine, a superior Ford car made by mass production, but rather on the analogy of a work of art, or better an organism in which no two members are exactly alike. Its order is no mere conformity to rule but the order which springs from being animated by a single purpose to which each part can make a contribution of its own. It is a universal system in all its manifold diversity equally present to the divine mind, and so marvellously and minutely ordered that each single member has its place to fill and is required to be itself and nothing else, and each individual can be fully understood only in relation to the whole. If we believe that this is the truest view that we can take of the world-order, that it is organic not mechanical, purposive not merely standardized, and this is the kind of view to which biology points, then there is at least room for Christian prayer. Such would be no breach of the world order but would work in full accordance with it. It is the effort to co-operate with the divine purpose in a given concrete situation, and the prayer itself may be viewed as one of the antecedents necessary before the desired result can be fully realized. Assuming that not only every man but every situation has its unique place in the cosmic whole and can be fully appreciated and explained by its relation to such, then its meaning and value cannot be adequately

explained in terms of general laws and uniformities. There always remains something that escapes scientific analysis, an element that is unique and individual and cannot be reduced to anything else. And this element may well include prayer or be interpenetrable by prayer. As we saw in an earlier chapter, duties and acts of moral choice or worship are individual and concrete. They are reactions to a definite situation which has never occurred before and which can never occur again.

From another standpoint, if we accept the view of the universe as an integrated whole expressing a single purpose and only ultimately explicable in terms of that purpose, then we are driven to conclude that the present can only be fully understood in the light both of the past and the future taken together, and not in the light of the past alone. Science formulates its laws in the light of the past and the present only. From its nature it cannot consider the future except as a uniform continuance of the present. But it is arbitrary and unreasonable to suppose that if the whole process is one, the investigation of a single portion, namely that part of it which has run its course, can give us the right to reach conclusions which will necessarily and unconditionally apply to the whole process. There must remain at least the possibility that the future will disclose new facts which will compel a revision of such conclusions. The more that we believe the future to be bound up organically with the past in one orderly whole, the more cautious must we be of attempting to explain the present only in terms of the past. Here too we must remember that Christian prayer looks not to the past but to the future. It is always possible that the answer to prayer may wear the look of something novel and extraordinary so long as we judge it only in comparison with the past and forget its relation to the future. The only kind of answer to prayer

that is rationally inconceivable is one which would be out of harmony with the forward movement of the divine purpose. Granted that this purpose has been only partially revealed in the past, we must admit the possibility of new and fuller revelations which may seem at first sight to be breaches of the old uniformity but are only superficially so, being in reality only a fuller and more developed expression of that divine purpose which underlay the old uniformities.[1]

This must not be taken to mean that we in any way depreciate law. The enormous and growing success of the various branches of science proves that their common method must go a long way in its correspondence with the method of reality. What we are concerned to deny is that it goes the whole way. The idea of the universe as a systematic embodiment of one divine purpose leaves room for the view that the actual realization of this purpose calls for long stretches of practically uniform and monotonous occurrence, which lend themselves to expression in terms of mechanical uniformity without serious miscalculation. There may be reasons which we can appreciate for long stretches of such apparent uniformity, which however need not prevent the possibility of its apparent contravention when the underlying purpose of the universe should demand it. On such occasions calculations based merely on the observation of the past would be stultified. The appropriateness and orderliness of the new departure could only be perceived at the time by minds who were in the deepest sympathy with the mind of God. At a later stage its consistency would be apparent to all.

From this point of view it follows that in prayer the Christian normally accepts the laws that science has discovered as a guide towards learning the will of God.

[1] For the line of thought in these last sections I am much indebted to Prof. A. G. Hogg's *Redemption from This World*.

He strives in all humility to understand them in order to work with them in forwarding God's plan. He has no right to expect any superseding of them to suit his own convenience or pleasure or to dispense him from the trouble of trying to understand them. The existence of these uniformities is one great means of moral discipline. They condition right conduct and impress on us the consequences of our actions. No true Christian dares to presume on God's goodness to deliver him from the painful consequences of his own folly or wilfulness. Here we get the answer to the objection mentioned above that sanitation had done more to check pestilence than prayers. The Christian does not wish to deny this. He believes that health is God's will and that science has shown that health is best secured by certain medical and sanitary action. It is therefore God's will that these devices should be employed, and to attempt to substitute litanies for them would not be really devout but rather silly. To pray to God to avert ills and to refuse to make the fullest use of the means that He has provided in nature for their prevention and cure is only a form of disobedience. No prayer is genuinely Christian at all unless the man who offers it is striving at the same time to do all in his power to attain that end which in his prayer he declares that he believes to be the will of God. At the same time this is not to say that in dealing with pestilence prayer is of no use. Doctors and those who are coping with it need wisdom and courage to face difficulties and dangers, and they may rightly pray for the power to see their duty and do it.

While then our prayers will normally assume the fixed order of the natural world, it is perfectly reasonable to believe that occasions might arise in which the fulfilment of the divine purpose demands what appears like a breach of customary order, a sensible interference with that sequence of events on which human wisdom

relies. Whether such an abnormal event has occurred ever or on any particular occasion is a matter of historical evidence. Before we believe in its actual occurrence we should demand satisfactory evidence and moral fitness. Nor is there necessarily anything unscientific in itself in praying for some special intervention of God. We are told that faith can remove mountains. If we do not commonly take that saying literally it is because we are persuaded that for the fulfilment of God's will mountains are, for all we can tell, best left where they are, and if they divide nations who wish to hold closer intercourse, engineers have learned how to pierce them with tunnels. In other words, our reasons for not praying for what are popularly called miracles are moral rather than scientific.

Throughout this discussion we have assumed that not only ' nature ' but this whole present order of existence is a part of a far greater whole and that its ultimate meaning is spiritual. We refuse to identify the terrestrial order with the cosmic order. Rather we hold that what is called the natural order is only as it were an enclave within the supernatural. It does not exhaust the self-manifestation of God. Beyond and above it are spiritual energies which do not normally operate there. Man as a spiritual being has the power of entering into relation with this wider environment. So in prayer he holds intercourse with God and releases new energies which operate in this visible world not contradicting, but in-dwelling and perfecting the natural order and carrying it forward to the fulfilment of the divine purpose. The supernatural crowns and completes the natural. The natural is not annihilated but transcended. Its laws are not broken ; rather it is shot through with a new and higher order of being. Just as the matter which is studied by physics and chemistry only discloses its full possibilities when it is possessed and indwelt by life and as life only reveals

what it really is when mind and consciousness have supervened, so the spiritual life supervenes upon the natural life raising it to a new plane without destroying it.[1] Prayer lifts up the individual to a realm of new and greater possibilities which falls outside the range of natural science and whose existence it can neither affirm or deny.

If an examination of the scope and methods of science shows that it can neither prove nor disprove the possibility of definite answers to prayer, why is the opposite opinion so prevalent? Two chief reasons may be suggested.

First, up to quite recent days theology had trespassed on fields belonging to some branch of science and was unwise enough to risk a battle with science on its own ground. The conflict raged especially round two points. Religious people had come to regard the Bible as making a series of infallible statements about the manner in which the world was created, the origin of man and the like. These were found to be inconsistent with the proved results of modern science gained by induction and observation. Leaders of religion unhappily attempted to maintain the scientific accuracy of all the statements of Scripture and to effect a not always quite honest reconciliation between the two positions. To-day, practically all educated people recognize that the Bible was never intended to give us miraculously dictated anticipations of answers to modern scientific questions. The science of the writers of the Bible was that of their own day, neither better nor worse. The proof of their inspiration is to be found in the moral and spiritual truth that they reveal. We must, however, in fairness remember that many of the scientific doctrines which theologians thought themselves bound to defend as essential parts of the Christian revelation, were originally only teaching that the Church

[1] Cp. W. Temple's *Christus Veritas*.

had accepted on the authority of the science of a former age, as for instance, that of the fixity of species. Thus the battle was really one between science and science and the fault of theologians was in some measure an undue reliance on the infallibility of an older generation of scientists.

We have already touched on the second point round which much conflict has been waged and on which science has been largely victorious. The older type of Christian apologetic tended to find evidence of God's activity chiefly in what was abnormal and startling and to base arguments for His power on the gaps in human knowledge. Science has increasingly shown that what was once mysterious can be reduced to law, and gaps in knowledge have progressively been filled in. Little wonder that the uneducated mind jumps to the conclusion that the old evidences for the existence of God have been disproved. But the Bible lays no stress on mere wonders as witnessing to the power of God. It often assigns them to the powers of evil. All turns on their moral character. Further, the order of nature and the exquisite adaptation of means to ends that it exhibits, witness to God's wisdom and power, even more wonderfully than what is viewed as merely mysterious. We cannot think of God as ever acting arbitrarily or capriciously. The old arguments need drastic restatement but the victories of science give no ground whatever for supposing that it will ever be able to give a complete account of ultimate existence. As we saw, it can give no explanation of origins; and the kind of order in the world which modern science itself is increasingly demanding is not that of mechanism but of purpose.

The victories of science over the champions of religion are evidence of the danger of trespassing on fields which lie outside the teachers' province. That lesson needs to be learnt equally by some of the champions

of science. There is every reason to believe that their incursions into the fields of theology will incur, where they have not already incurred, a like disaster. The authority of the expert is as such limited to his own department of knowledge. A man may be a great mathematician or a great zoologist. That will qualify him to give his opinion on questions of mathematics or zoology and to claim that his views should be heard. But if he proceeds on the strength of his reputation to dogmatize on questions of history or religion, his opinion has no more weight than that of any other educated man. The expert in history is the trained historian, in religion the saint and in theology the theologian. Of course in any particular instance the scientist may, happily, be a saint or even a theologian as well, but if so then his claim to be heard does not rest on his science. We recognize this principle in ordinary life. We do not go to a great physicist to get advice about investments, or roses, or the literary merits of Bernard Shaw. Why should we imagine that he will be infallible or even worth listening to on questions of religion or theology, unless we hold that they are subjects that anyone can discuss without previous knowledge or experience ? There are of course borderland questions where the researches of the physicist may be invaluable to the religious philosopher, but even here the evidence of the religious expert and the trained theologian must be equally sought and weighed before the verdict is given. We must not allow the amazing successes of science on the physical plane to blind us to its limitations.

We do not wish in the least to depreciate science or to dispute that its study may help us to a more intelligent and reverent prayer. Because we believe that this world is God's world, we cannot know too much about it and we wish to know the truth at all costs, in order that we may live and pray in fuller conformity

to God's will. The attitude of the scientist as he humbly and selflessly sets himself to investigate the facts has been well compared to that child-like attitude which Christ commended. Research calls for absolute honesty and fairness. Nature cannot be tricked or cajoled. Mistakes or slothfulness are always punished in the long run. The passion for truth is an element in the highest religion. Science delivers us from sentimental and petty views of God. The fresh air of its marvellous disclosures revealing the complexity and vastness of creation dispels the stuffiness of too many of our sanctuaries. The sterner aspects of nature correct the softness of much popular devotion. We are compelled to big views of God. On the other hand the scientific temper uncorrected by a wider experience may itself become narrow. Absorption in any special department of life may overdevelop one side of the mind and leave others underdeveloped. Powers that are never used become atrophied. The specialist always takes this risk. So it is possible that a scientist who fails to attend to the moral and religious side of his nature may gradually lose the power of appreciating moral and religious values. His views become contracted. His capacity for prayer and religion is dulled and so he loses contact with large parts of reality. All professions tend to have their characteristic limitations and prejudices. It is our duty to find out and allow for them. Those of the scientist are plain. The risk of them is the price that he has to pay for his practical success. Unless he deliberately sets himself to overcome them, they may end by disqualifying him for any experience of the things of the spirit. He will not see life steadily because he has ceased to see it whole.

To sum up, scientific objections to prayer are not based on any definite and proved results of science but rather on the extension of certain scientific principles to fields to which they do not properly belong.

The method of abstraction by which science has won its triumphs disqualifies it from any claim to lay down decisions about the nature of reality as a whole.[1]

[1]Besides the books referred to, special mention may be made of Hobson, *The Domain of Natural Science*, and Lord Balfour's philosophical writings, especially *Theism and Humanism*.

## CHAPTER V

### PSYCHOLOGY AND PRAYER

TO-DAY the attack on prayer has largely shifted from natural science to psychology. To the objections based on psychology we now turn our attention.

We must begin by some examination of the nature and scope of psychology. Since it claims to be a science, what is its subject matter? The difficulty in giving a straightforward answer to this question, which is a perfectly legitimate question, lies in the great differences of opinion among psychologists themselves. We must content ourselves here with giving a view which at least has very high authority, without attempting to define too precisely the limits of psychological investigation. There is an almost unanimous agreement that the subject matter of psychology includes the behaviour of living things, not only normal men but children and savages and the insane and also animals, since it is now taken for granted that the human mind no less than the human body has been evolved out of the sub-human. No hard and fast line can be drawn between the mind of animals and the mind of man. To a very large degree the same raw material of instinct underlies the lives of both. The term behaviour as applied to both men and animals is used in the sense of purposive activity, activity, that is, which cannot be explained in any merely mechanical

way but which expresses the striving, not necessarily conscious, to satisfy some instinctive desire ministering to the life either of the individual or the species. One school of psychologists, the Behaviourist school, attempts to limit the investigation simply to the outward behaviour of living things, ignoring consciousness altogether. In spite of much greater success than might have been expected, their attempt breaks down and cannot be consistently carried through. In describing the behaviour of animals they find themselves unable to dispense with such terms as annoyance and satisfaction, which plainly refer to inner states of consciousness with which we are familiar in ourselves. The attempt breaks down even more seriously when we turn to the study of human behaviour. We come up against 'meaning.' Outward acts produce results which cannot be derived from their external form. They are clearly symbols of something more than themselves. For a gentleman to take off his hat to a lady is an act that clearly has a meaning that in no way can be explained by mere analysis. Why should it be different from his taking his hat off when he feels warm? The difference lies not in any external detail but in its inner meaning. We cannot exclude in such cases as this some reference to consciousness. If we say that the subject matter of psychology is behaviour, then the term behaviour must be extended to include such consciousness as we can investigate. Of course it is plain that the only consciousness to which we have immediate access is our own. But by means of language we are able to describe our consciousness to others and to receive descriptions of their consciousness from them. In the case of animals we can only infer the nature of their conscious life by reading into it our own, and this is a proceeding that needs the greatest caution. In any case it is most important to remember that for modern psychologists 'mind' means something far

bigger than conscious mind. We must accustom ourselves to the idea that our behaviour is determined by mental processes which can be inferred but of which we are largely or wholly unconscious.

Assuming then some such view of the subject matter of psychology, we observe that it adopts the methods of the natural sciences and would desire to be ranked among them. It marks out a portion of experience as its province. Within this it observes and records phenomena. Having collected its facts, it sets to work to classify them into series and groups. It then seeks to discover a formula or law which will describe these sequences of fact in the most convenient and comprehensive manner. The formula may be purely conceptual in character, that is, it may employ terms and concepts which have been invented by the psychologist and have, as far as we can directly perceive, no actual existence in the world of nature. Such concepts include that of 'unconscious mind' or again that of 'complex.' These cannot be proved to have phenomenal existence but have been devised to make possible a consistent and comprehensive explanation of mental phenomena. They justify themselves so far as they enable the psychologist to reduce his facts to order and to predict future happenings. The cures wrought by psychotherapists attest the practical value of such concepts and suggest that they represent at least some approach to knowledge of actual reality. In all this psychology is only following the familiar methods of physical science.[1]

Nevertheless, the claim of psychology to rank as a science would be widely disputed. And a detailed examination of any psychological system raises a doubt whether the attempt to make it conform too closely to the physical sciences may not after all prove mis-

[1] For a clear statement of the aims of Psychology, see B. Hart's *The Psychology of Insanity*.

taken. We saw that biology was for a long time hampered by using the categories and methods of physics and chemistry which were adequate only for dealing with inanimate objects and has made great progress since it emancipated itself from these. In dealing with life, concepts borrowed from sciences which dealt with static material and merely mechanical processes tended to distort the presentation of the facts. So it is equally possible that the too thorough adoption of the categories and methods of biology may be in danger of distorting psychology, which deals with a higher level of existence, namely mind. It is significant that the success of psychology has been greatest where it studies mental processes which are directly linked up with and conditioned by physiological processes and therefore conform exactly to the laws of the bodily organism. When it attempts to describe the way in which people behave generally, its success is most limited. It never gets beyond broad and vague descriptions. Since men are all so far alike that they possess the same kind of bodily organism and therefore react to the same stimulus on the bodily plane in much the same way, it can go a certain distance in predicting future behaviour, but not very far. Psychology is often in danger of being pulled in two opposite directions. One party who are chiefly interested in the study of animal behaviour tend to reduce all human behaviour to the merely animal level and to minimize or ignore the differences between animal conduct and the highest kinds of human conduct, just those indeed which are specifically human. Others who fix their attention on the most developed kinds of human behaviour tend to be impatient of the truth that it is based on a foundation of animal instinct and impulse. Of these two dangers the former is really the more serious. The higher can never really be explained by being expressed in terms of the lower.

We must also add that psychology is still a very young science which on many points is only feeling its way, and we must not confuse its often tentative hypotheses with ideas that have stood the test of time. The perplexing manner in which every psychologist forms his own terminology or adopts that of some other writer in a sense of his own, the difficulty of finding a suitable vocabulary, the plain and aggressive contradictions between different schools of psychologists, are sufficient to warn us of the complexity of the subject and the conjectural nature of many of the theories that are put forth.

When we pass on to consider the psychology of religion, we may begin by pointing out that the attempt to describe and explain religious behaviour of all kinds is nothing new. Men strove to depict their spiritual struggles and experiences and to compare them. They tried to construct as it were a map of the spiritual life. They desired to learn by what path they could find inward peace and strength. All this involves a rudimentary psychology of religion. The New Testament, for instance, is full of it, as when St. Paul describes the struggle between the ' flesh ' and the ' spirit,' borrowing his terms from the Old Testament. In all ages theologians have made the mind of man an object of study, and Christian doctrine has been largely based on some kind of psychology. What is new is the application of strictly scientific method and the attempt, in the light of evolution, to link up religious feelings and habits not only with those of ordinary secular life but even with the behaviour of the animal world. But in all this there is nothing that is either unreasonable or irreverent. Inasmuch as religion finds expression in various kinds of behaviour, that behaviour can be a legitimate object of scientific study. Since prayer and worship involve mental activity and there is not the slightest reason for holding that the mind works differ-

ently in religious activities or that we keep a different mind for this purpose, we may legitimately suppose that the same laws hold good for the action of the mind in prayer as elsewhere. The results of the scientific study of the working of the mind may be expected to be of great help in assisting more concentrated and earnest prayer and in awakening and using the emotions in the service of God. But the best use of our mental powers in devotion lies outside the present discussion.

Granted then that a psychology of prayer is legitimate and indeed beneficial, its methods will be those of any ordinary science. It will begin by collecting all the evidence it can find as to the behaviour of men in prayer. Probably it would be wise to start from the most objective side, with the rites and ceremonies of social religion. As we saw, dances and sacrifices are older than spoken prayers. It will be necessary to try to get behind the outward acts to their inner meaning. They express desire of some kind and involve a theology however crude. At a later stage actual prayer forms may be available and these must be studied and compared. The sacred literature of the various religions will also throw much light on their ideas about prayer. Sympathy will be required in order to understand the inward experience of those who pray, as disclosed in their forms of devotion and hymns. Another source of information will be found in letters and biographies. Their descriptions of prayer will be all the more valuable when their witness is indirect and the disclosure of their mental states is unconscious. In recent times attempts have been made to employ the questionnaire method. This, in reference to such a subject as prayer, has marked limitations and dangers. The answers supplied tend to come from one type of mind whose prayer life is in some way abnormal. The ordinary man whose experience of prayer is equally real is not

fond of analyzing himself and has no startling discoveries to record if he does. Yet it is the everyday prayers of the average man and not the rare and exciting experiences of the few which constitute the best evidence for the naturalness and validity of prayer. Further it is difficult to distinguish between the actual experience at the moment of prayer and later reflection on that experience, and the difficulty is increased when the questions asked imply the expectation of a certain kind of answer or suggest the discovery of certain emotions.

The question suggests itself, whether the psychologist is competent to discuss prayer if he never prays himself. A comparison with some form of art, say, music, may assist us to give an answer. A man who lacked any ear for music might be able to study sonatas and symphonies as examples of human behaviour. He could investigate their structure by reading the scores and draw out the mathematical relation between the notes and harmonies. He could also, in a spirit of detachment, by reading what musical critics have written or by conversing with musicians and composers collect much information about their standards of taste and value. He might listen to their descriptions of what music meant to them or their explanations why they preferred this or that composition. He might also go to a concert and observe the behaviour of the audience. In these ways he could learn a great deal about music and its mechanism and be able to formulate sound general principles. But his inability to enter into the experience itself would seriously impair his power of understanding it. His repetition of musical terms would awaken no memories of past emotional experiences. Only so far as his capacity for enjoying some other æsthetic experience enabled him to translate the language of music into the terms of some other art, would he have any power of appre-

ciation. So with prayer the full meaning of prayer must necessarily elude the man who has never prayed. At least some religion of a rudimentary sort is required if the psychology of prayer is to get beyond the barest description of its mental machinery or a mere summing up of its principles as exemplified in the history of prayer. Such a description would stand in much the same relation to praying as a gramophone record to the speaking voice. It would be perfectly accurate, but the personality and the urgency would have departed.

We now approach the vital issue. Psychology can describe the working of the human mind as it offers prayer. It can analyze the motives which underlie particular prayers. It can explain the instinctive tendencies which prompt religious behaviour. But can it do more? Can it either prove or disprove the reality of a God with whom man claims to hold discourse? Can it give such an account of human experience in prayer and the consequences which follow it, as to show that a belief in God is now superfluous?

We must admit that a certain type of popular Christian apologetic has seized hold of psychology as an ally who will supply an easy method of proving the existence of God. The appeal is often made to Christian experience without stopping to consider what is meant by the phrase. It may cover anything. The real question is, Experience of what? If we allow that we can prove the existence of God by an analysis of our own inner experience, then we must allow that it is equally possible to analyze religious experience and find no room or need for a God there, and the person who decides whether God can be found there or not is the psychologist.

A consideration of the nature of psychology goes to show that this procedure is really unwarranted. The question of the existence of God lies outside its pro-

vince. It can give a scientific account of mental processes and activity but there its authority ends. It claims to be a science and to achieve its success by the methods of science. But if it claims the benefits of being a science it must also share the drawbacks. From its very character no abstract science can deal with ultimate realities. It must start from what is given. Nor can it deal with absolute values. It can explain the ' how ' but cannot go far in explaining the ' why.' These problems belong to theology or philosophy. It finds the individual as difficult as does any other branch of science.

Accordingly the explanations which psychology gives of prayer are true as far as they go, but can neither prove nor disprove that when we pray we are in touch with an invisible superhuman world surrounding us. This aspect psychology rightly ignores. Even if it were proved by some other branch of knowledge, psychology would abstract it in dealing with any particular prayer or act of religious behaviour. The existence of such a world does not fall within its scope. Dr. Pratt has lately given an excellent illustration of this point, in discussing extreme cases of mystical experience. He imagines a race of men, the great majority of whom are blind while a few see. These latter, whose eyes are open, are constantly receiving light sensations. The psychologist investigating such cases observes that these sensations are the invariable accompaniment of open eyes. Using the principle of single difference, he argues that the opening of the eyes is the sufficient cause of the light sensations and fully explains them in the psychological sense. No reference is needed to the sun or to any exterior agency. The man who has sight may indeed insist that he sees the sun and not merely his own sensation, but the psychologist would assure him that he was substituting interpretation for description, and mistaking subjective

sensation for something objective. He would claim to describe and explain these sensations in terms of the physical organism. "Both seer and scientist would be right. The psychological explanation would be complete (in its own way and within its self-imposed limits) and it would be vain to seek to prove the objective existence of the sun by breaking down the psychological correlation of light sensation and organic condition. And yet it would be true that the seer saw the sun." So when men of prayer assert that they are in touch with Another than themselves, psychology cannot deny that their assertion may be correct because it can label and compare the processes of their minds.[1]

Again, if we take a given mental situation and succeed in resolving it into its psychological elements, that does not answer all questions which might rightly be raised about its nature. Professor Coe gives a good illustration. "Let us imagine ourselves called upon, . . . . to give a complete psychological account of a mother fondling her baby. We see right away that we have before us a complex, the mothering process, which must be analyzed into its part processes. Here are touch and sight sensations, ideational activities, emotions, and instincts, all connected with corresponding neural processes in nerve endings, transmission tracts, and brain centres. Thus we resolve the complex. Each part of the machinery is discriminated from the other parts, and we behold all working together. This is the mothering complex. But something remains still; it is mother-love, of which thus far we have not said a word. In our analysis of the mothering complex the baby is simply a stimulus of touch and sight, an excitant of nerve endings, a part of mechanism. But within mother-love, that is, within the actuality of the experience,

[1] Pratt. *The Religious Consciousness*, pp. 457–458.

what is a baby? What is the baby, that is to say to the mother, and what is the mother to herself, now that a child of her very own has come?"[1] The Professor of psychology here falls into poetry, a clear sign that the limits of science have been reached. We might even push the illustration a little further and point out that the experience of a particular mother fondling a particular baby contains a number of individual elements which could not be expressed even in poetry, since they rise out of the unique history of the mother and the child. We will only add that the experience of prayer contains an equal element which is inaccessible to the mere psychologist but not therefore any the less real.

We can reinforce our contention as to the limits of psychology by considering certain definite explanations of prayer which have been put forward as disproving its objectivity. They claim to show that prayer is not the communion of man with any external reality but simply the activity of his own mind, though he does not recognize it as such. One school treats prayer as auto-suggestion, another teaches that all religion is really a form of mental disease and that God is a projection, another finds in all religious behaviour a product of the group mind. These explanations are not entirely exclusive of one another, but it will be convenient to criticize them separately.

Let us consider first the question of auto-suggestion. What does the term mean? Suggestion is an activity of the mind whereby it accepts an idea on other than rational grounds. The critical faculty by which we judge and test ideas is either inactive or its vigilance is in some way evaded. The idea is able to get past it into the mind and find a lodging there, although the grounds for believing it to be true are inadequate or absent. The idea thus established in the lower levels

[1] Coe. *The Psychology of Religion*, pp. 11–12.

of the mind is often most active and produces visible results which the mind only partially recognizes as proceeding from itself. For instance, it is suggested to a man who is drowsy or who is very ignorant or whose critical power is under-developed, that he will feel ill when next he looks on the moon. Between the feeling of illness and the sight of the moon there is no rational connexion at all. A man who was wide awake and whose reason was alert would reject the idea with amusement or scorn as absurd. But if the idea is not criticized and finds a lodgment in the mind it will produce the result. When he sees the moon he will feel ill and the feeling of illness will be real, yet the cause of it will be nothing physical but simply the content of his own mind. There can be no doubt that a large proportion of the ailments even of civilized and educated people, and still more of backward races are due to bad suggestions accepted by the mind and not to organic disease. Such ailments can be cured by good counter-suggestions, which again operate purely within the mind and have no physical or objective counterpart. The suggestion that the patient will feel well and strong can produce great even if often only temporary results. Suggestion is usually regarded as of two kinds. The first is 'hetero-suggestion,' when it is made by another, and this is all the more powerful when the other is backed by some form of prestige. The second is 'auto-suggestion' when the suggestion is made by the man to himself. As a matter of fact, it would be truer to say that all effective suggestion really includes both. There must be auto-suggestion, in so far as the mind must accept the idea if it is to be operative, and also there must be something of the nature of hetero-suggestion, in so far as the idea must have come from somewhere in the first instance, though the mind continues to brood over it and to suggest it to itself. The

widespread use of suggestion in mental healing has demonstrated its power for good as well as evil and is a great witness to the reality of mind and the influence of mind over body. The ascertained results go a long way towards refuting the materialism of earlier naturalism. But we can see how easily it might be turned into an argument for a purely human explanation of the power of prayer. The man who prays imagines that he is speaking to One who is conceived as being all-good and all-loving, who will hear his petitions and send down power and wisdom. In dwelling on the character of God the mind is really suggesting to itself that it will receive power and wisdom. The man of prayer regards the answer as coming from God, but it is really due to the idea of strength and success suggested to his mind by the fixing of his attention on the thought of an all-powerful God of goodwill. This suggestion stimulates and reinforces his own conscious endeavour. The more confidently that the belief in God's willingness to aid is held or the more deeply emotional the attitude of mind, the more suggestible the man becomes and the greater the possibility of startling results. He rises from prayer with all his faculties quickened and renewed, filled with a new confidence because he believes that he is backed by all the resources of almighty God and so he has every chance of success in his undertaking. But the same results might equally have been produced by well planned auto-suggestion. There is no need to assume that God is more than an image in the mind, an aid to successful auto-suggestion.

We are not concerned to deny that this view contains a considerable element of truth. Granted that suggestion may be the means of deepening bodily and mental energy, there is no reason why it should not be the channel by which we receive many answers to prayer. If concentration on whatever suggests goodness and

power has these beneficial results, there is no reason why this law should not continue to hold good when the goodness and power are conceived of as centred in a living God who is our heavenly Father. We should agree that, let us say, the doctrine of evolution in no way contradicts the belief that God created the world. It only describes the way in which He created it. Nor should we hesitate to thank God for our food because it comes through the human agency of the farmer and the baker or because the corn out of which it was made grew in accordance with the laws of nature. In the same way suggestion may be the psychological channel through which many blessings enter into our lives. To assert this neither proves nor disproves the existence of a God from whom they ultimately come and who created both life and the conditions of life.

Again, auto-suggestion is in itself a mental process and no more. As such it is intellectually and morally neutral. It possesses no content of its own and cannot produce either truth or falsehood, right or wrong, health or disease. Which of these alternative results is produced depends not on the process of suggestion but on the quality of the idea suggested. And the quality and nature of the idea suggested exist independently of the mental process by which it is apprehended, unless we are prepared to give up all objective standards of truth and goodness. Here we come face to face once more with the limitations of psychology. It cannot deal with ultimate realities. Our moral and intellectual standards by which we test the content and results of auto-suggestion cannot themselves be caused by auto-suggestion.

Granted then that the good results of Christian prayer can be explained in some cases as caused on the psychological level by the suggestions implanted in the mind through the contemplation of the power and goodness

of God as revealed in Christ, that does not answer all the questions that can be rightly asked about prayer. Whence did the mind obtain this health-giving content, the vision of love and righteousness which is able to transform character? Does it correspond to anything real or is it only a beneficent illusion? Is there really a God at the back of the world order? Is Christianity true? These questions involve issues that go far beyond the range of psychology. They belong to philosophy. In other words, the element of suggestion in prayer is not the whole even of the prayer activity, still less of the life of which prayer is only one part. The person who prays and receives strength through prayer is the same person who also thinks and reasons and has in some form a view of the world into which his beliefs about prayer have to be fitted. Unless his ideas of God which operate through prayer are consistent with the ideas of his rational life and can be vindicated both by reason and conscience, the result must be a dissociation of mind which can only lead to weakness and a divided life. This is exactly what we do not find in the best Christians.

Here we get support from psychology itself. Dr. William Brown, the eminent psychotherapist, has come to the conclusion, as a result of practical dealing with his patients, that so far from prayer being reducible to auto-suggestion, it is truer to say that auto-suggestion is implicitly prayer. It is rarely successful unless the patient has at least a subconscious belief in the friendliness of the universe. "The emotional basis of a particular auto-suggestion is some measure of confidence, implicitly felt if not explicitly confessed, in the general beneficence of the Nature of Things. In religious natures this confidence expresses itself definitely as faith in God; and, with this explicitly assumed, auto-suggestion is quite clearly a form of prayer." Again, he tells us that merely thinking

mechanically of a desired result is more likely to impede than to forward its attainment. And as the patient improves through the working of auto-suggestion he gets more and more a feeling of faith in a power beyond himself. "This increase of faith cannot be regarded as a disease phenomenon, seeing that it is one that emerges in the course of a cure and is a thing that progressively develops as the patient is returning from a state of mental disease to a state of mental health."[1]

We may here add that confirmation of the close connexion between suggestion and prayer is obtained from the disastrous results that follow from wrong mental pictures of God. Unchristian ideas about God and the kind of prayers that God will accept, have a deplorable effect on character and action. The more that men pray such prayers the further they get away from the mind of Christ. That is why historically idolatry has always been regarded as the worst enemy of true religion. For the root of idolatry is false ideas about God. This does not in the least prove that prayer is merely subjective. It is only what we should expect. If we grant that God employs the laws of the mind as the channel through which He bestows certain blessings, we cannot expect Him to suspend those laws just because they produce evil results when men contemplate perverted and unworthy ideas of God. The very fact that these false mental pictures can be corrected shows that they are not merely the invention of the individual mind, and do not proceed from any physical necessity. Christianity has always taught that true prayer demands the purging of the mind and the progressive understanding of the will and character of God. It includes the readiness to learn.

On the other hand, though we grant that suggestion is the psychological channel through which many of

[1] W. Brown, in a series of addresses called *Religion and Life*, p. 51. Cp. his *Talks on Psychotherapy*, pp. 90–93.

the effects of prayer enter into our lives, we must not exaggerate its scope. So far as it explains the working of prayer, its explanations only cover certain types of answer to prayer. Christians believe in a God who not only does everything in general but also acts in response to particular situations and has preferences. His answers to prayers are not simply automatic but personal. He is not like, say, a fire that warms all who fulfil the necessary condition of approaching it. His action is on a higher level, that of personal love and will. Thus it is perfectly true to say that, when we receive help and life through auto-suggestion, the fact that the new energy is manifested in us does not in the least rule out the truth that it ultimately comes from God. Christians have always laid stress on the immanence of God and on His work in the mind of man. But we do not believe that God's power or action is exhausted by His immanent activity in the world and in man. He has resources in reserve. He has not excluded Himself from other modes of action by instituting those uniformities which we commonly call laws. Over and above the general guidance of the world's processes by such laws He can act in what seem to us interventions. Further, if we admit that man possesses a real power of choice, however limited, we must allow for a certain element of contingency in the world order. God may need to act in new ways to meet new situations. If then we hold that answers to prayer include not only inward enlightening and strengthening, but a reordering of outward circumstances in order to correspond with the inward renewal and so make possible the fulfilment of the divine purpose, we have travelled into regions with which psychology has no concern. Again, if we believe in the power of intercession, once more the results cannot be assigned to suggestion, unless indeed we limit intercession to those with whom we are in personal contact.

No doubt even on the theory that prayer is no more than auto-suggestion, some kinds of prayer might well be encouraged as being efficient forms of suggestion. We should be invited to contemplate ideals of courage and strength and nobility, to feed our minds on all that is highest and best and to expect fruitful results. But this would no longer be Christian prayer. At most it would be meditation such as that practised by Christian Scientists or cultivators of the 'Higher Thought' which, we gladly allow, produces in many cases marked changes for good in character. Christian prayer postulates a real and living God at the other end. Religion means to be more than auto-suggestion. If prayer is only such, it is to be feared that the discovery of the truth will in the case of most men destroy the possibility of praying. In the interests of human happiness it would be wise to keep the secret dark. Many have received great stimulus to health through coloured water and suggestion, but if once the illusion were dispelled the power of the suggestion would disappear. So if prayer is only an activity of our own minds, the explanation makes the activity commit suicide. Is not this a good reason for pausing before we accept it? But Christianity claims to be accepted because it is true and for no other reason, and if prayer can be proved to be no more than auto-suggestion we must face the truth and its consequences. We cannot pray as Christians to a make-believe God. We cannot worship a God who is only an aid to profitable self-culture. But, as we have seen, on grounds of reason the theory is at least unproven.

If, then, we dismiss the notion that auto-suggestion by itself can create the idea of God, we must next face the attempts of certain psychologists to give a purely psychological explanation of the idea of God. They assert that the idea of God is a product of the mind's own activity, no longer recognized as such. They

would claim that with our modern knowledge we are able to investigate the unconscious motives of human behaviour and the hidden sources of human belief, and that religion cannot be exempted from this investigation.

One such line of explanation is that God is simply a ' projection.' Projection is one of the methods by which the mind attempts to evade a conflict within itself and to attain to harmony. All conflict is painful, and when the mind is unable to solve it in a healthy way, it resorts to various means to ease the strain and patch up a superficial peace. In projection it refuses to own one part of itself which is repugnant to the personality as a whole and transfers it to some other real or imaginary individual. What is really subjective is transformed into something objective. This is quite a common mental process. For instance, it is notorious that a man possessing some fault or failing of which he is ashamed is most intolerant of the same fault or failing in others and is always disposed to imagine its presence in them. By projecting the offending quality on to some one external to himself and refusing to acknowledge it as his own, he is able to express his disgust at it without the pain of any conflict within himself. This is only one type of instance. In other cases ideals that are felt to be too high may be projected on to external entities. Granted then that projection is recognized as a common mental process, we can understand how God may be a projection upon the universe of man's inner feelings, a part of his own consciousness split off from the main stream and showing itself in a disguised form.

In particular, God is often said to be a projection of the ' Father complex.' Children often have abnormal relations to their fathers. They are afraid of them or regard them as tyrants domineering over their independence, or even are jealous of them as rivals for their

mother's love. Or, on the other hand, they sometimes have an unhealthy affection for them, as when they are weak and indulgent and encourage them in self-gratification. These abnormal attitudes of various kinds, may as the child grows, instead of being outgrown, become fixed. In any such case, since the attitude is felt to be out of harmony with the main trend of the life or with the hard facts of experience, it is repressed and more or less deliberately forgotten. But though it is no longer in the consciousness, it is still active in the unconscious mind, and the mind, in order to ease the conflict, projects it on to something objective and external, namely God. Thus our relation to God is merely our old relation to our fathers persisting as a repressed complex and projecting itself on to something that is regarded as an external reality.

A second and similar explanation of the idea of God and of the whole of religion is that it is due to regression to an infantile habit of mind. Psychotherapists find that when the mind is oppressed by circumstances that are too hard for it, it may, if it is diseased, show a tendency to escape by regressing, that is, by going back to a more primitive response to a situation. Amid the horrors of war soldiers who did not possess the mental vigour to face out and deal with the situation became childlike. That is, the mind ran away from the difficulty of the present by trying to get back to an earlier state of existence in which it was sheltered and protected by its parents. So it is argued that religion is simply a case of regression. The adult having left behind his home, tries to make a father for himself, namely God, in whom he may trust as he did in the old days at home. Religion is the attempt to remain a child, in a state of tutelage, instead of going out to battle with the hard realities of the world.

Others again criticize religion as auto-erotic. There is a stage in childhood when the child is naturally

auto-erotic, that is, loves itself. It is said that religion is based simply on this tendency to self-love, which has not been outgrown and left behind as it should have been in the course of a sound and healthy development. Thus piety is only a disguised form of self-love. The pious person regards himself as the special favourite of God and as such entitled to enjoy spiritual privileges and ask for benefits of all kinds. On this view religion is not so much regression as a failure to progress. It rests on a persistence of childish tendencies which should have no place in a full-grown life.

We may begin by bringing a common criticism against all these theories. They all assume a diseased mind. That the phenomena of projection and retrogression occur cannot be disputed, but the cases in which they are found are pathological. It is illegitimate to draw inferences from the functioning of a diseased mind to that of a healthy mind without qualification. A practical psychologist can recognize such states. He can distinguish between those parts of the mind that are sound and those that are not. By analysis he can trace out how such abnormal tendencies arose. It may be true that no man is entirely normal, but that does not alter the distinction between abnormal and normal. As a matter of simple fact, many psychotherapists recognize the value of prayer and religion in building up the life of their patients, and this practical use far outweighs the more or less theoretical objections as evidence for the normality of religion and prayer. We may even turn the tables on those who assert that religion is the product of mental disease by asking how we can be sure that irreligion is not the product of mental disease. In the opinion of some who are fully qualified to judge, those who are most prominent in attempting to reduce religion to a mental disorder themselves show all the symptoms of suffering from abnormality, from a

repressed God-complex. In other words, their hostility to the idea of God springs from their failure to satisfy an instinctive tendency to religion which is part of the normal make-up of human nature. This desire for God they have refused to recognize, and it takes its revenge in an irrational prejudice against all forms of religion. Atheism may itself be a form of auto-eroticism. The one theory is at least as plausible as the other. Both are psychologically possible. Both cannot be true and who or what is to decide between them? Clearly the court of appeal must lie outside psychology.

To return to the criticisms in detail, we admit that they contain a large amount of truth, in so far as they explain a large amount of actual religion. Religion like any other human activity can be perverted and it is often perverted along these lines. Thus we did not need the new psychology to tell us that our idea of God largely depends on our own character. "What men themselves are, that will they suppose God to be." Even at our highest we can only interpret God in terms of the best that we know. We project upon Him our loftiest ideals. We find in our highest conceptions of righteousness and love the clue to His nature, since these come from Him and reveal Him from whom they come. But to admit this is not to say that God is a mere projection. Rather He is a reality existing in all His fulness independently of our thoughts about Him. Just as in our human friendships our capacity for appreciating and really knowing our friends depends on our moral sympathy with them, so it is in friendship with God. This does not show our friends to be mere projections, even though our understanding of them may vary enormously at different times, nor does it in the least show that God is a mere projection. We must not fall into the mistake of confusing God with the idea of God. Projection

may explain the one but not the other. Psychologists are apt to confuse the two.

Again, it has long been recognized that our mental pictures of our fathers or those in authority over us have great influence in moulding our mental pictures of God. It is a standing difficulty that children who come from bad homes misunderstand the metaphor of the Fatherhood of God. It is a commonplace that even the best of earthly fathers is but an imperfect illustration of His perfect Fatherhood. No doubt the religion of many men is perverted by the fact that unconsciously they think of God in wrong ways, because as a result of their early experiences wrong ideas have associated themselves with the name of Father, but this does not disprove either the reality of God or the fact of His ideal Fatherhood. As a result of our past experience we get wrong ideas associated with many things, but this does not affect the truth that they do exist objectively, and that we can correct our ideas of them by self-criticism and a fuller experience.

In the same way much religion and many prayers do show an infantile attitude to God. The taunt that religion is " the opium of the people " is true in certain cases. The motive of a large number of pious persons is " safety first." They pray that they may be sheltered from the dangers and difficulties of life. So, too, it is an elementary truth of the devotional life long taught and recognized, that devotion may easily in many subtle ways slip into self-love. We may in prayer come to substitute our own will for the will of God. No doubt in some cases religion has never really been anything else than a form of self-gratification. Psychology can express in its own technical terms these aberrations, but it cannot prove that they are religion or show that religion is an illusion. Truly Christian prayer, as we have shown, implies a view of religion that is precisely the opposite of these. True

Christianity is an adventure for and with God. So far from making it his object to save his life, the Christian accepts the plain teaching of Christ that "he who saves his life shall lose it," and is ready to "lose his life" for Christ's sake that he "may find it." If following Christ means taking up the Cross, that is assuredly no comfortable and sheltered existence. Any prayer that voices a desire merely for shelter and escape from the toil and stress of life is fundamentally unchristian. In the same way genuine Christianity desires nothing selfish. It puts first the will of God, which embraces the highest good of all men without any favouritism. It regards it as right to pray for personal blessings only when such are necessary for true self-development as a member of the Christian community. It asks for such blessings as protection and safety only because, and in so far as, these are necessary for the carrying on of God's work in the world. A great deal could be said on this subject, but it is sufficient to protest that a caricature of Christian prayer must not be mistaken for Christian prayer itself, and that the test of true prayer is to be found in the mind and character of Christ, whom no one would accuse either of seeking to escape from the responsibilities of life or of aiming at self-gratification. On the contrary, many psychologists admit that Christianity fulfils the only test that psychology can apply to religion far better than any other form of religion, in that it presents an ideal that is able to satisfy and find expression for all the instinctive tendencies of man and harmonize them by directing them towards a single purpose. Christian prayer, since it contributes to this end, makes for health and sanity. The best Christians have found at once fulness of life and new power to make the best contribution to the common welfare.[1] It is hard to suppose that if prayer

[1] Cp. J. A. Hadfield in *The Modern Churchman*, September, 1924, p. 335 ff.

were only a disease of the mind it would continue to show itself beneficial or transform strong characters into weak. Illusion is weakening and cannot endure. We appeal to the facts. Christianity like any other movement may claim to be judged by those who represent it at its best. The Saints are not mere neurotics.[1]

We now pass to the kindred theory that prayer is rather the product of group suggestion. It is argued that as the primitive tribe embarked upon some common enterprise, whether war or food getting, its members became filled with a new spirit, a new sense of energy. They were carried out of themselves by a corporate emotion. Some more than human power from outside seemed to take possession of them and to lift them up to new levels of life. Not having the advantages of a knowledge of modern psychology and never having heard of mass-suggestion or herd instinct, they imagined that this access of vitality came from their tribal god. But this god is really no more than a projection of the corporate spirit of the tribe. Even God, as Christians believe in Him to-day is, we are told, " essentially a social God, a concentrated projection of all the qualities useful to the herd in a supreme supernatural personality—the supreme herd-leader of humanity, just as the old tribal gods were the tribal leaders. He is the creator of man and of the whole of man's environment. He gives laws to the herd, fights its battles, protects it from harm, punishes its evil-doers and rewards the righteous." Later, when the individual has developed an ethical self and become spiritually autonomous, the social God becomes the repository of his own highest ideals, but the identification of the god of the individual with the god of the community can only be completely carried through

[1] For fuller treatment of some of these questions, see Thouless' *An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion.*

" when the herd has reached its highest state—the brotherhood of man—and the ethical self completely recognizes its obligation to serve the herd. Till that condition is reached there is always the possibility of conflict. Each complex may deny the God of the other, but neither will be right, for each God has complete validity in His own sphere."[1] The last sentence makes clear that on this view God is frankly a mental product, what some sociologists call " a collective representation," that is, an object imagined by members of a group, each under the influence of the rest. On this hypothesis, prayer would be at most a self-identification with the corporate will of the community or the race in the pursuit of its highest ideals. Such an attitude might have the power to lift the individual out of himself, but there would be nothing superhuman about it. It would approximate to a form of patriotism. Religion would be simply the creation of humanity, an expression of its highest aspirations. Prayer would be on the level of art or poetry.

Enough has been said to give a general account of this line of attack on prayer. In reply, we must begin by pointing out that the social origin of prayer and religion is no argument against its validity. For all knowledge and all science have the same parentage. They are equally social in their beginnings. They spring out of the desires and needs of the primitive community. If religion is a collective hallucination, science may well be the same. In short, this theory as to the rise of religion raises the most fundamental of all questions as to the validity of knowledge of all kinds. Can we know objective reality at all? That is a problem on which psychology cannot throw any light. We must repeat that it can describe mental processes by which we build up what we call knowledge, but it cannot even discuss whether such know-

[1] Tansley. *The New Psychology*, pp. 137–138.

ledge is objectively valid. We shall have to deal with this in the next chapter. It is sufficient here to insist that psychology cannot prejudge the issue whether in the matter of religion or elsewhere.

Meanwhile we will be content to draw attention to some important facts in the history of religion which are in flat contradiction to the facile acceptance of the view that God is merely the personification of the spirit of the tribe or humanity. As Professor Clement Webb has shown in his book on *Group Theories of Religion*, we must distinguish between the mental process by which man comes to form the idea of God and the validity of that idea when formed. "I am not, indeed, prepared to say that to speak of a divine reason is merely to call a social or collective reason by another name. But I should not doubt that the conception of a divine reason first dawns upon the human mind in the form of a conception of a merely collective or social reason which the individual shares with his fellows. It first becomes *distinguished* from the conception of a merely social or collective reason, when the individual attains the level of development at which he not only sees in that which all his fellows recognize as valid or desirable the really or objectively valid, the really or objectively desirable, but comes to recognize that something may be really and objectively valid or desirable which not only he but his whole group fail to accept or to desire."[1] As a matter of history this stage in mental progress can be seen in the religious development of Israel. While the gods of the nations round them were little more than the personifications of the social ideas of the nations themselves, the prophets of Israel had risen to the conception that the will of Jehovah might be in antagonism to all the popular standards and expectations of His people. Jehovah was assuredly no mere projection

[1] pp. 159–160.

of Jewish ideals. The same difficulty appears even more strikingly in the figure of Jesus Christ. The originality of His outlook and message cannot be disputed. Were His prayers only a self-identification with the corporate spirit of that Judaism which He claimed to criticize and supersede? That would be a difficult position to defend.

To sum up, the psychological objections to Christian prayer are at best inconclusive. They cannot disprove its reality. They point forward to problems which go beyond the province of psychology. It is there that the battle will in the last resort have to be fought.[1]

[1]For further treatment, see R. Rouse and C. Miller, *Christian Experience and Psychological Processes*, and H. Balmforth, *Is Christian Experience an Illusion?*

## CHAPTER VI

### PHILOSOPHY AND PRAYER

ANY discussion of the relations between philosophy and prayer must begin with the preliminary question, What do we mean by philosophy? One answer defines it as "the thinking view of the world." This definition is not entirely satisfactory, but it brings out its general aim. It attempts to do for the whole of human experience what the particular sciences do for special sections of experience, to give a connected account of all that exists, showing that it is an intelligible whole, the working out of certain ultimate principles. Thus in contrast with such sciences as are analytic, philosophy is synthetic, or, to use a better word, synoptic. They deal with certain restricted aspects of reality: it attempts to gain a view of the whole system of reality, to see the world all together. Their explanation, from the nature of the case, can only be provisional and descriptive: its explanation desires to be final and what is most important, to be not merely descriptive but interpretative. As we saw, questions of ultimate purpose and value lie outside the province of science. It is concerned with what is, not why it is, or what it ought to be. But philosophy tries to reach ultimate issues, to rule out no problem as alien to its enquiry and to present reality as a unified system in which the meaning

of all existence is laid bare, and moral, æsthetic and spiritual values have their due place.[1]

The method of philosophy, having due regard to the greater complexity of its subject-matter, resembles that of science. Its task is to set forth in the simplest possible terms a continuous and rational account of the total facts of experience. These include those which the sciences investigate, but the philosopher does not attempt to do all the work of the scientist over again. Rather he accepts the descriptions and hypotheses offered by the scientists as valid, so far as they go. He assumes that they provide the best account of that portion of reality at present available and seeks to co-ordinate and reinterpret them from a new and more comprehensive standpoint. In other words, the data of philosophy are not the detailed facts of science as accumulated by observation and experiment but the laws and explanations given by science as a result of its own labours. To test their truth and adequacy is not the business of the philosopher. He trusts the scientist at his own job.

Further, the data of philosophy include other elements of experience which at present do not appear to be wholly susceptible to scientific treatment. Due weight must be assigned to those factors which all scientific thought finds a nuisance and tends to minimize or ignore, such as individual feeling and existence and the problems of change and movement. In virtue of its synoptic ambition, philosophy cannot ignore any element in life, however awkward. It must examine not only the 'how' of things but the 'why.' It cannot hand over to some other branch of thought the problems of the meaning and purpose of anything

[1] Cp. Dr. Temple's description in *Men's Creatrix* (p. 7). "Philosophy is or should be the most thorough-going effort that is prompted by the scientific impulse . . . it is a determined effort to think clearly and comprehensively about the problems of life and existence."

that happens. The comprehensiveness of its aim accounts in large part for the contrast between the wide agreement reached among men of science and the very narrow field of agreement among philosophers. The universe is not an easy thing to explain.

So when we are told that philosophy has disproved the possibility of prayer, the retort is obvious, "Which philosophy told you so?" They are many, and speak with many tongues. A short study of any history of modern philosophy leaves us dizzy with the clamour of countless competing theories of the universe. There is hardly a single statement of importance on which all schools of thought would agree. This should not lead us to despair of philosophy or tempt us to say that it has achieved nothing. Some world-view is a moral and intellectual necessity. All reasonable beings ask what are really philosophical questions, and a philosophical question can only receive a philosophical answer. We all have a philosophy of the universe of some kind, usually home made and bad at that. Nor does the fact that we reject this or that philosophy prove that it possesses no value. Philosophy, like poetry, can give us flashes of insight into reality and though we may refuse to accept it as a complete account of existence, it may enable us to grasp some aspect of truth for which our final philosophy, if we ever get one, must find a place.

For our present purpose we must be content to consider certain typical theories which leave no room for Christian prayer. All that we can do in the space at our disposal is to point out that if they abolish the reality of prayer, they also abolish the reality of a great many other activities in our daily life about whose importance we entertain no doubt. Since we do not allow these philosophies to deter us from persisting in these other kinds of conduct, it is unreasonable to allow them to disturb us in saying our prayers.

For instance, one school of metaphysicians represent the world as a closed system or process in which particular action or feeling or thought has its fixed place and could not be other than it is. Thus the universe might be compared to a vast machine in which we and everything are parts. Or the system may be thought of as logical rather than mechanical. The universe is regarded as the working out of a predetermined plan, eternally present to the absolute mind, and every event and person can only be understood in reference to the fulfilment in time of this world-scheme on its predestined lines. Or again, in pantheism all that comes to be is viewed as the expression of one life-force, embodying itself in the various grades of being and coming to self-consciousness in man. God is merged in the world process and He or It is to be found equally everywhere. All such interpretations present us with a clear-cut and intellectually consistent account of reality. They attract the tidy mind and men who are inclined to contemplation rather than action. They even invite mystical experience of absorption in the divine. But they leave no room for prayer except in the sense of vague self-identification with all that exists. Further, though such systems appeal to poets and thinkers and even scientists, who have developed one side of their nature, they end by depriving the active struggle of life of all meaning. In effect they reduce to an illusion all moral effort, and even those who accept them intellectually deny them by their practical life. If we are simply details in any quasi-mechanical system, then there is no meaning in effort of any kind. All real distinction between good and evil vanishes. "Whatever is, is right," and contributes to the enrichment of the whole. Saint and sinner alike are expressions of the one divine life. And not only are all practical efforts futile and all moral distinctions unmeaning but even truth seems,

to disappear. We think as we must think. We have no more responsibility for our conclusions than a calculating machine. If we are compelled to commit a fallacy in argument, we can no more blame ourselves or be blamed by others on this hypothesis, than if we show ingratitude to a friend. Truth is simply what it has been determined that we should think. How can any philosophy of the universe be true or false, since our acceptance or rejection of it has already been decided for us ? As against this we cannot prove that we enjoy any real power of choice. All that we can argue is that our moral consciousness, our sense of shame, our readiness to praise or blame others, and indeed the whole structure of our social and moral life imply such an assumption. If all is predetermined, words like right and wrong, good and evil, lose more than half their meaning. So long as we continue to struggle to do right and to improve ourselves or others or the world around us and believe that our actions achieve a real result, so long as we are indignant against injustice and selfishness or make distinctions between moral agents and mere machines, by our conduct we give the lie to this type of philosophy and express our faith in the reality of moral struggle and human action. Thus we demand in effect a philosophy that at least leaves room for prayer.

Nor is it hard to find the reason why philosophers so often tend to take up, at least in their studies, this kind of attitude to reality. Man's behaviour in the face of the world from the first includes, so to say, three strands, at an early stage fused with one another but later distinguished. There is first the attempt to find out what is there, based on the expectation of finding a rational order in the world on which he can count. This underlies the later developments of science and philosophy and in its initial stages is prompted solely by practical needs, though afterwards it is also inspired

by the desire for truth for its own sake. Secondly, there is a criticism of human life issuing in the awareness of a clear distinction between right and wrong. He compares the world as it is with what he judges that it ought to be and what he must strive to make it. So he acquires not an intellectual ideal of order but a moral ideal of righteousness. Thirdly, he comes to conceive of a Power active and present in the world and controlling its processes, with which he is impelled to enter into relations. He feels that there is behind the visible order a life not wholly unlike his own. From this impulse there emerges religion. As we said, in the response of primitive man to his environment these three strands are interwoven and are only gradually distinguished as he develops. But they all make an equal claim to validity. What, however, tends to happen, especially in scientific and philosophical circles, is that the intellectual interest not only interpenetrates but absorbs the other two. It treats morality and religion not as autonomous and distinct strands of life, but merely as phenomena to be explained and reduced to the intellectual level. So the intellect imposes upon them its own methods and conclusions without any respect for their vital independence. The inevitable result is the type of philosophy in which the reality of morality and religion has been swallowed up by the predominant desire to reconcile differences in a conceptual unity.[1]

Science cannot be blamed because it ignores the moral and religious factors in life. In virtue of its abstract method it is entitled to concentrate on certain aspects of experience and to treat the rest as irrelevant.[2] It pays the price in the fact that its conclusions are only valid within certain limits. Science must be determinist. But philosophy cannot plead for the same

[1] Cp. Strong. *Religion, Philosophy and History,* Lect. ii.
[2] Cp. the treatment in chapter IV.

tolerance. It claims to cover the whole of life in all its departments. If its interpretations are inconsistent with the facts that it attempts to explain, then it is shown to have failed. The facts of morality have as much claim to consideration as facts of any other kind. If those who are acquainted with them from inside complain that the account that philosophy gives of them explains them away rather than explains them, then it must try again. The test of any system of thought is not only its consistency with itself but its consistency with the concrete realities of life. The intellect always loves abstractions and generalities because they are its own children, but we must not allow such nepotism to frighten us away from reality. We claim that prayer is one of the facts for which philosophy has to account and that the men who pray have the right to say whether the account is satisfactory.

Again, certain types of philosophy deny the possibility of any real knowledge of God, which would reduce prayer to something like an illusion. This, as we insisted above, is a philosophical and not a psychological problem. Here we come up against the most fundamental of all questions, How far can we trust our faculties at all? May not all experience be one vast and meaningless illusion? Clearly this problem might fill many books. We can only deal with one or two points. First, extreme agnosticism defeats itself. If reason nowhere gives any certainty, the same reason cannot be used to argue either for or against any particular belief. If you want to knock a man down, you yourself must have some solid ground to stand on. If all experience is untrue, then we have no possible means of knowing it. Even the opinion that it is illusion must itself be illusion. All rational life rests on an act of implicit faith in "the ultimate decency of things." Without it we could never have risen above

the level of mere instinct. Secondly, we hope to show that the knowledge of God which prayer requires has as good a claim to be considered as real as other forms of knowledge, and that prayer itself has as much right to be held valid as any other form of conduct.

Knowledge is a form of activity that cannot be resolved into anything else. We all think that we understand what we mean by 'knowing.' The process can be analyzed and described. Assuming the existence of knowledge, we can discuss what are the conditions of attaining it, but in itself knowing is *sui generis*. We may reject the theory once held by some philosophers and still lingering in the popular imagination, that in knowing the mind is purely passive and that ideas are simply impressed on it by objects outside, as an impression is made by a seal, and that all that the mind does is to register and compare such impressions. This theory shuts us up to the view that we are only conscious of ideas, not of the objects themselves. And in that case how could we be confident that our ideas bear any resemblance to the objects? Do we know more than our ideas? Such a question cannot be answered, because it never ought to have been asked, and indeed is meaningless. Yet many popular objections against prayer go back to the assumption that we can know only our idea of God, not God Himself. This whole theory of knowledge has been tried and found wanting. It lands us in a barren agnosticism and leads nowhere. It has been generally abandoned. Its clearest refutation is that of actual practice. We act as if our knowledge was real and find that it works. We make mistakes and our knowledge is often imperfect, but the contrast between truth and falsehood, our efforts to remedy our mistakes and our hope of learning, all prove that we act on the belief that some measure of real knowledge is in our reach and that our efforts are not wholly unsuccessful. In other words

while we do not know exhaustively any actually existing thing, our knowledge is true so far as it goes.

Now all knowledge includes both a subject who knows and an object which is known ; it involves both the activity of the mind and the presence of something given from outside. Both elements are required. We have discarded the view that knowledge is caused simply by the impact of some object on the mind and that all the work of the mind is to record the impact. It is true that the mind gets from without the material on which it works. We live in a world that we find and do not make. But it is no less true that from first to last, from the simplest processes of observation to the most complex and deliberate efforts of thought, the mind is not only a receiver but a worker. The difference between men and animals lies largely in just this greater range and complexity of their mental processes in dealing with the material presented. To attempt to distinguish sharply between the objectively real and the constructive share of the mind in knowledge is hopeless. We must recognize the presence of both.

This contribution made by the mind to all knowledge is familiar to all who examine our every day life. We distinguish between what we actually see or feel and the inferences that we draw often unconsciously from our sensations. The success of the conjuror depends on his tricking us into supposing that we see far more than we actually do and placing a wrong interpretation upon our experience. Our attention is distracted at critical moments so that we may fail to observe important movements and may substitute the inferences of our own minds. Again, in the law-courts the witness has to be helped to distinguish between what he perceived and the inferences that he has drawn from those sense-perceptions by later reflection. The apparent untruthfulness of quite honest witnesses is due

to this confusion. A witness saw at a certain time and place, a man. That is correct. But he went on to infer in his own mind that it was Mr. A. who is now proved by incontrovertible evidence to have been miles away. The cause of the mistake is that he misinterpreted his sensations. He saw a figure. He inferred that it was a man and further that it was a particular man. These examples of mistaken interpretation only go to show the working of a process that has been inherent in all knowledge from the first. Some interpretation of our sense experience there must be or we could never recount it at all. It may be questioned whether we experience any sensation without some effort at interpretation. Even our simplest feelings contain a certain cognitive element.

Let us approach this same question from another angle. Three men go for a walk, a botanist, an artist and a plain man. They see a rose bush. How far is it true that they see the same bush? We assume that the same image is reflected on the retina of their eyes and that the waves of light produce identical sensations of colour, though if one were colour-blind even this would not hold good. But when we go on to consider what they see, differences cannot be avoided. To the plain man it is just a rose bush. It may suggest memories or associations due to past experience, but these are accidental. To the botanist it is a member of a particular genus and species. He can point out its habits and peculiarities. The sight awakens in him a very different and far more complicated mental activity. His knowledge of the bush goes far deeper than that of the plain man. In the artist the same bush stimulates a very different response. What appeals to him is form and colour. His artistic training enables him to appreciate them as the other two cannot; and this appreciation, though the element of feeling predominates in it, has yet a definitely intellectual side.

It claims to include a real knowledge. In short, though the rose bush remains the same, each man knows it in a way of his own. He sees what he has the eyes to see. His knowledge is conditioned by what he brings with him, by his mental capacity built up by past acts of knowledge. To complete our picture, imagine a cow arriving to inspect the bush. In some sense it is an object for the cow ; it can feel and see it. How does it know it ? Probably it only rouses a vague instinctive impulse to discover if it is good to eat. The cow's knowledge is limited by its mental capacity.

Primitive man, even if he was never a cow, was not yet a botanist or artist or even the plain man of to-day. Still less was he a judge or a conjuror. Yet the same kind of mental activity was involved in his earliest efforts to understand and control the world. Knowledge has always and everywhere been built up out of experience. In describing its development we would draw attention for our present purpose to the following points.

The earliest human experience, so far as we can recover it, began, as an infant's experience begins, with a vague and indefinite awareness, a continuum of feeling, in which all distinctions that are drawn later through the activity of the mind are as yet submerged. In this state of consciousness, sensation, perception and thought are blended. From this elementary experience progress in knowledge comes through gradual differentiation, by a growing recognition of differences as lying contained within one experience, until at length man comes to view the world as he does to-day. This process of growing differentiation does not spring from any desire for truth as such, but rather from practical needs, from the largely unconscious striving after life. The instincts on which life is based contain in themselves a power of discrimination. They select objects

in the environment which will satisfy their desires, and all through human history the activity of the mind by which we break up our environment into classified objects is conditioned not only by the intellectual but by the conative side of our nature. It is urged on not only by the will to know but by the will to live.

Secondly, while animals by instinct in some sense perceive objects, and pick out those which will satisfy their desires, man has risen above this level. By the use of reason he has been able to form concepts, to select classes of objects and ticket them with the same label, to frame general ideas, to reduce experience to some measure of order and to discover connexions between its parts. In this he has been aided by language. A sound or word fixes the general concept and enables man himself to remember his general ideas and to share them with others. Speech and thought develop side by side and the latter cannot be efficient without the former. So by the labours of generations handed down through language the original confused experience is progressively differentiated into something like an ordered world.

Thirdly, this process of differentiation includes the coming to be aware of subject and object. In the original feeling-continuum even this distinction between the self and its environment, between the inner world and the world outside, between myself and other selves was submerged. Only as the manifold diversities implicit in the content of experience were drawn out, did the self come to know itself as a centre of consciousness and activity and to distinguish itself from the external world over against it and from other selves.

Fourthly, all this growth and progress is conditioned throughout by the social nature of man. Knowledge is never a merely individual problem. The vital question is not how does the mind of this or that man come to know these objects, but how has his mind developed

that it is now able to know objects. Throughout man has come to be what he is by membership in a community. Thought and language are socially conditioned. Words and general ideas store up the mental labours of generations long past. Only through social tradition is advance possible. In spite of modern fiction there are no grounds for holding that an infant brought up alone among beasts could ever develop into a rational being. All recorded cases go to show that after the age of about seven even the capacity for such development becomes atrophied. In short, both the distinctions between an inner and outer world, and between subject and object, and the awareness of the individual self were only attained by a long process of conceptual and socialized thinking. These differences were latent no doubt in the original experience, they are not the invention of the mind, but only through the developing activity of the mind have we become aware of them.

We may now apply these thoughts to the consideration of our knowledge of God and its claim to validity. We hold that a knowledge of God was implicit in man's original undifferentiated experience, side by side with a knowledge of the external world and of himself and other selves. Such knowledge when it has been drawn out can be legitimately described as an intellectual construction. It has been won not simply by experience, but by reflection upon experience. In this sense knowledge of God may be said to be an inference from experience. But so also is my knowledge of myself. The belief in God does not rest merely on any argument from analogy. I do not come to be aware of my own existence and then look round the world and deduce from what I see that other bodies walking about may, so to say contain other selves. Still less do I argue that behind the world there must be a much larger self still. Rather human consciousness is from the first a social consciousness, including the con-

sciousness of an objective world and of myself in relation to other selves by intercourse with whom I come to know myself and them more clearly. And this consciousness further includes a dim awareness of a power, awful and mysterious but also attractive, at the back of all things in whose presence we stand. The dim awareness of this power as something other and more than external objects or human selves is equally a normal feature of the human mind.

A recent writer has made a strong case for tracing back the origin of religion to an element of feeling present from the first in human experience, not primarily an ethical idea but a unique feeling-response to an external reality. In itself it is irreducible to any other kind of feeling and can only be experienced, not defined. It is ' a priori ' in the mind in the same way as, for instance, the idea of beauty. That is to say, though it is a capacity inherent in man, it needs experience in order to evoke it. Just as man's love of the beautiful can be evoked by the presence of a suitable object because it is waiting to be evoked, so this ' numinous ' sense, to use Professor Otto's term, is a normal part of man's nature which has to be accepted as such. The origin of religion then is in awe of a unique kind in the presence of the ' numen,' in self-abasement before a power that attracts as well as dismays. To seek its origin in animism, magic or folk psychology is, apart from historical difficulties, to commit the mistake of confusing the original experience with what are only tentative and in the long run unsatisfactory interpretations of it. As thought develops, man rightly attempts to rationalize the numinous experience, to express it in terms of intellectual concepts which can be called rational and personal because they correspond to what is rational and personal in us and can be compared and defined. But this idea of God never exhausts the being of God. There always

remains in the background the non-rational numinous experience, which is never completely exhausted by the intellect and always challenges a fuller interpretation. In the process of thought something always escapes. God as apprehended in worship, God as divined in all His various manifestations is always more than the theological definition of God. An entirely rationalized religion is impossible. Thus religion makes the claim to be an independent and autonomous element in human life. Though the idea of God is rightly moralized and the power that speaks in the moral law is rightly judged to be one with the power behind the world, religion is not mere morality. Some such view as this, though few would accept Professor Otto's theory in all its details, is becoming increasingly dominant. Knowledge of God does not begin with speculation, it begins, as all knowledge begins, with feeling in the presence of an object.[1]

We must not attempt to prove too much or to overstate the definiteness of the conception of God for which we can appeal to the authority of wide consent. All that we desire to maintain is that there is every reason to believe that behind all the religions of mankind there is an objective existence of some kind. The discrepancies in religious thought do not go to show that it is all an illusion but are rather to be explained as due to different attempts to understand the meaning of religious experience. Something of the same variety and inconsistency appears whenever we study man's efforts to know external realities of any kind. We may well expect that, if God is in the least like what religion has always supposed Him to be, the greatest and most wonderful of all realities, the difficulty of attaining any knowledge of Him will be inconceivably greater, and any growth in such knowledge must depend less on intellectual acuteness than

[1] Cp. Otto. *The Idea of the Holy.* (E. T.)

on humble and patient waiting on His self-manifestation and on moral sympathy with His purpose.[1] The thought of God as our heavenly Father who encourages the prayers of His children is an inference which implies a considerable amount of reflection upon experience and is even denied or disputed still by certain types of religion. As against them we should maintain that the Christian belief makes sense of all the facts in a way that no other belief succeeds in doing. It is the most satisfactory interpretation of experience. We must think of God in the highest terms that we possess and therefore we cannot picture God as less than personal. That does not mean that we regard Him as a glorified man on a level with ourselves or that we suppose that our relation towards Him is simply like that to our neighbours. God cannot be simply one among many selves. It is in Him that "we live and move and have our being." All that we argue is that it is less inadequate to conceive of Him as personal and to take up a personal attitude to Him than to conceive of Him in any other way. Christian theology has always confessed that man can never attain a complete knowledge of God. All that it claims is that we can enjoy a genuine though partial knowledge of God here and now, and that this affords the one and only basis for life.

On grounds of philosophy then prayer has every right to be taken seriously. Mere thought can never either prove or disprove its reality. There are difficulties connected with it, but so there are with every thing that really exists. Nothing is more mysterious than my own existence. The persistence of religion is in itself a strong argument for its substantial reality. Unlike other forms of human activity it cannot justify its continuance by any direct appeal to the five senses. Some one has imagined visitors arriving from another

[1] Cp. von Hügel. *Essays and Addresses*, p. 56 ff.

planet and being perplexed by the universality of religious observances and quite unable to understand their meaning because they could see nothing in the external world to justify them. We cannot go out into the road and point out God. Yet it remains true that religion is based on experience, even though that experience is more subtle than the perception of the material world and in some ways demands more attention and though the object experienced is less easily discerned. We should be slow to assert that only those truths are true which are obvious and immediately apparent to the ordinary man. The higher values always demand more moral and mental effort for their discovery and appreciation. Christianity has always taught that the knowledge of God must be won at a cost and that only those can win it who are willing to pay the price. In every sphere of life it is largely true that we find what we are interested in and that we make our own world by what we choose to attend to. To attempt to explain away the religious impulse as mere delusion is easy, but it will never convince those who know religion from inside.

One other question may be raised here. Granted that philosophy admits the possibility of real communion with God, are there any forms of prayer that it rules out as irrational? The chief difficulty has sometimes been found about certain kinds of intercession. It has been held, for instance, that while it is right and useful to pray for those with whom we are in personal contact, where action of some kind can follow up the prayer, it is irrational to pray for those with whom we have no personal contact and whom perhaps we only know by name. Ought we to pray for the Deacon Mzwamba in Central Africa whose name we cannot even pronounce? Attempts have been made to defend such intercessions on the ground of telepathy. These do not carry us very far. Not

only is the possibility of telepathy still doubted by many scientists, but even if it were proved it would only show the existence of some mysterious force. Such prayer would not be necessarily religious at all any more than the sending of a telegram. Further, it raises a real moral difficulty. How far is it right to attempt to influence a person even for what we believe to be his good, without his being aware of our efforts? The only line of defence that goes to the root of the matter is to base the practice of such intercession upon our common relation to God. We and those for whom we intercede are alike children of the one heavenly Father, and stand in a relation to Him which transcends all the limitations that condition human intercourse. As we insisted in an earlier chapter, all such intercessions are for the fulfilment of His will for those for whom we pray, and there is nothing impossible in the belief that, as we are dependent on one another for all sorts of practical benefits, so we may equally be dependent on the efforts of one another for all sorts of spiritual benefits to be received through the action of God. As in the one case we owe much to those whom we do not know and who are only linked to us by a common humanity, so in the other case there may be far wider possibilities of helping others on the spiritual plane than are at first sight apparent. If the principle of universal interdependence in and unto God be once granted, philosophy cannot really answer the question one way or the other. The appeal lies to practical experience. Here the verdict is wholly in favour of intercession. Christ Himself employed it and saints of all ages have never hesitated to pray for men in all lands. There is a very considerable amount of evidence for answers to such intercessions, which needs indeed to be used with the utmost caution but cannot be dismissed arbitrarily. If we are surrounded by a world of super-sensuous reality whose laws we can only

dimly discern we must be content to acknowledge our limitations. If we have once allowed the possibility of real answers to prayer, then intercession for those at a distance introduces no fresh difficulties.

Let us now sum up our position. We claim to have shown that our knowledge of God has as good a claim to be considered valid as other forms of knowledge. Man has come to attain an idea of God in much the same way as of himself or of his fellow men. Through reflection, aided in this case by the possession of a material body separated in space from other like bodies, he came to differentiate between himself and other selves. He began by viewing persons, himself included, as it were from the outside. He thought of himself, as young children speak of themselves, in the third person. As the consciousness of his own inner life deepened, he came to interpret the inner life of others in like manner. But his environment was not exhausted by his fellow men and animals and material objects. It included the felt presence of a supernatural power or powers. At the earliest stages he could not interpret these so as to believe in a personal God, because he was not yet fully aware of his own personality. As he developed, he regarded the numinous power increasingly as personal. The old interpretations were discarded as inadequate to interpret the sense of God which all along had been implicit in human experience. The advance in the knowledge of God has had many set-backs. There have been times of stagnation and of regression. Superstition is essentially reversion to ideas about God which once were the best hitherto available but now should have been left behind. It may be safely asserted that to-day to man at his highest development some form of monotheism is the only tolerable interpretation. Animism or polytheism, for instance, have been permanently cast aside as unsatisfying. As Christians we believe

that through primitive religions, even with all their absurdities and immoralities, God was gradually revealing Himself in such ways as man could comprehend, and leading him to be discontented with his successive efforts to express the divine until at last he was ready to receive God's fullest possible disclosures of Himself in Christ. Man's attitude to the universe has always included an attitude that we can only call religious, and this has an equal claim to be considered valid with those other attitudes that are characteristic of human life.

We also argued that if certain philosophies presented us with an account of reality that destroyed the possibility of prayer, at least in the form of petition, that need not unduly disturb us. This outlook can be explained, and the same theories would also render impossible all moral action and effort. In practice no one acts on them, and this is strong evidence against their truth. Even in the case of intercession philosophy cannot disprove its value. As long as we go on helping and trying to influence one another, we may go on praying for one another, since in our common relation to God all limitations are transcended. In short, we hold that the proved value of prayer and intercession suggests that so far from needing to obtain the leave of philosophy before we pray, we should boldly claim that prayer is one of those facts which it is the duty of philosophy to explain.[1]

[1]For further reading special mention may be made of D'Arcy, *God and Freedom in Human Experience;* Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses,* Articles 2, 3, 4 and 11; Webb, *God and Personality,* Lects. ix and x.

## CHAPTER VII

### PRAYER AND TRUTH

WE will conclude our treatment of some of the intellectual difficulties that surround prayer, by raising a question that has been implicit in the whole discussion, How do we expect to recognize the truth about prayer when we meet it? This in turn is only one aspect of a bigger problem, namely, What is the meaning of truth? or, What is it that makes truth true?

To this last query the ordinary man has an immediate and straightforward answer. "Truth," he replies with impatience, "is the conformity of thought to things. Statements are true so far as they correspond with the facts." Unhappily, like most answers of the kind, the more closely that it is scrutinized, the less satisfactory does it appear. It meets certain simple and obvious cases. If I declare that my house is on fire, the truth of that statement can soon be tested. Or if I see a bush and think at first sight that it is a briar but on coming nearer discover that it is a hawthorn, this theory of correspondence is adequate. We have, however, already seen that plain 'facts' and mere 'things' are not always so easily to be found. The same 'things' have very different meanings for different persons. The bare recital of a 'fact' involves some measure of interpretation by the mind. Which is the real rose bush? The bush as seen by the plain man, or by the botanist, or by the artist?[1] Further, if truth is the correspondence of thought with things or statements with facts, we can hardly apply this test of truth without falling into a circular argument. We shall begin by laying down that this or that pro-

[1] Cp. above, pp. 105 ff.

position is true because it corresponds with reality and in the next moment have to admit that we only know reality by making true propositions about it. The plain man, as usual, is not wholly wrong, but his test of truth is inadequate.

A more satisfactory criterion of truth is to be found in the idea of consistency. A statement in order to be true must be consistent both with itself and with the rest of our knowledge. Plainly we cannot accept any view that is self-contradictory or that contradicts some other view which we have good grounds for holding. We may in particular cases be obliged to suspend our judgment, or to hold in our mind two apparently conflicting theories that we are as yet unable to reconcile, because both have good evidence in their favour. But this attitude is only provisional. We hope soon to discover some point of view that will include and harmonize all those elements of experience that are contained in the two theories. Coherence is a real test of truth, but not one that will give us an immediate decision in all cases. What is in the long run found to be incoherent must be rejected as false. But it is important to notice that this rejection is determined by the nature of reality itself. For it is through the observation of reality and experiment upon it that propositions about it were formulated in the first instance and later were sorted out and compared. Here lies the measure of truth in the plain man's position. It is independent and objective reality that constitutes truth and prompts the rejection of untruth. We should also remember that truth is the product not simply of the individual mind but of the corporate mind. The process of verification is the task not of this or that man but of the community. There is often no short and speedy road to the ascertainment of truth by applying the test of coherence. The process may be protracted over many generations.

But the difficulty does not lie only in the nature of the test or in collecting the verdict of the common mind, it also lies in the complex nature of man himself. He is not purely an intellectual being and, especially in such a subject as religion, the truth of a belief must be judged not only by its harmony with other intellectual beliefs, but by its conformity to his practical needs. A true belief should help to put him into right relation with his whole environment. A leading exponent of the philosophy of religion has expressed the problem thus. "Truth is always a form of satisfaction, and in religion it implies the satisfaction of man's rational and practical nature. Spiritual or religious satisfaction which means truth, means also that man is in harmony with God, the world, and other men, so that his spiritual nature is in harmony with itself. Hence the solidarity of religious truths, for they all lead up to and find their consummation in a supreme truth. . . . . But the unity of truth is only partially realised by us, and there is no single test by which we can determine the validity of every judgment which claims to be true. Nor will this surprise those who remember that the nature of man is a concrete whole which includes thinking, feeling, and willing. In the degree that a religious doctrine satisfies thought, and ministers to the practical and inner life of man, is its validity assured."[1]

To look at it from another side, the apparent working value of any religious doctrine or practice is not a proof of its final or complete truth. The experience of the individual, especially his feelings, needs to be supplemented by the experience of his fellows, the experience of one race or generation by the experience of others. The wider the range and the greater the variety of temperament and culture from which the evidence is

[1] Galloway. *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 367–368. The whole section is valuable.

gathered, the more weight it carries. But we must remember that a custom or idea may possess considerable working value under certain conditions of life or thought but little or none when those conditions pass away. On the other hand, if a custom or belief does not work in practice it may at once be rejected as inadequate or misleading even if not wholly false. In the Old Testament the traditional belief that goodness was rewarded and disobedience punished in this life was found not to work and therefore was discarded by the leaders of thought. It was seen to be inconsistent with the order of the world.

This idea of the coherence of truth might be developed at great length. It is sufficient here to insist that the truth of any practice or idea of religion must in the long run be determined by its consistency with both the best thought and the best living of the day. It remains to apply these considerations to the idea of Christian prayer.

We claim that throughout this book we have been applying this principle of coherence to the Christian idea of prayer. We have demonstrated that the doctrine of Christian prayer is consistent both with itself and with the general Christian outlook. We have seen that the amazing practical successes of science do not in any way disprove the possibility of real communion with the unseen world and of constant interaction between that world and this. We have argued that psychology can describe the mental processes of prayer and even the psychical channels through which many of its blessings are received. It can help to diagnose morbid spiritual conditions. But from its very limitations as an abstract science it cannot pronounce a verdict on ultimate realities. At most it can assist in the construction of a moral ideal which will satisfy and harmonize the many impulses of our nature. Passing on to philosophy, we saw that while certain

types of philosophy leave no room for prayer, they also leave no room for real moral effort and indeed reduce all life and effort to futility. Others again deny the possibility of any real knowledge of God, but we tried to show that our knowledge of God though necessarily only partial, had every right to be considered no less valid than that of ourselves. We have also appealed to the persistence of prayer in some form through the ages. The religious attitude, which includes a petitionary element, appears to be an essential and almost universal part of man's reaction to his environment. Under artificial and unhealthy conditions it may be repressed or become atrophied, and in certain individuals the capacity for it may be relatively small, but, though its outward expression has varied with man's moral and intellectual development, there is in man a natural and abiding desire to get into touch with the Power behind the world. The consensus of evidence as to the reality of communion with the supernatural is all the more remarkable because it is derived from all ages, countries and classes and cannot be verified by any direct and immediate appeal to the senses. It cannot fail to impress all who study it and is marked in the higher forms of religion by a marked conformity to type. With all their wealth of diversity of character, the Christian saints who may be regarded as living arguments for the value of Christian prayer exhibit a wonderful uniformity of attainment.

We are justified then in holding that intellectual uncertainties should not frighten us from entering into the sanctuary of God and falling on our knees before Him. They can be faced and met. We can be both rational and religious. In the last resort it is to practical experience that the appeal must be made. The full meaning of prayer can only be known by those who try it. The best and holiest men of all times agree in inviting us to share with them its treasures. "O taste and see how gracious the Lord is."

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